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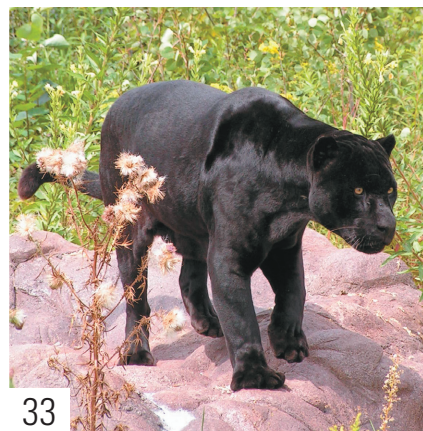
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Photo by Mike Hnida

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Photos courtesy of The Wildcat Sanctuary and PCML Photography

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Photo by Karin Newstrom, www.karinnewstrom.com

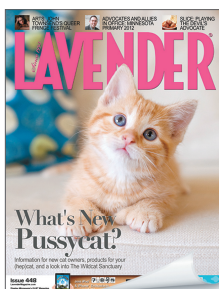
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Photo courtesy of Ian Alexander

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ONLINE



Online Magazine



Prizes



ON THE COVER

Ridiculously cute kitty cat. Photo by Karin Newstrom, www.karinnewstrom.com

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FROM THE EDITOR | Andy Lien

This is my 27th issue. This means that I've got a full year's rotation of 26 issues behind me as the Managing Editor of *Lavender*. Do you know how long I've been waiting to be able to say that? Just how I've yearned to have at least one year behind me so that not everything is brand-stinking-new? Oh, it's a good feeling.

I'm not one who wants time to pass too quickly, but knowing that a full year of issues had to happen before I would fully know my ear from my elbow with regard to the editorial calendar, I was antsy. And, now that it has passed, I can reflect on a year of great successes and challenges. Many of the successes are fairly easy to identify:

1.) The 26 issues exist in their entirety, and nobody perished during the production of them. Sure, there were late nights and a steep learning curve, but producing a magazine is something that is learnable.

2.) Between 26 issues lies a revamped and reinvigorated website that has more content for you, accessible all the time and to a greater extent than anything we can do in print. It's growing, it will become even more robust, and I can't wait to see what will happen this next year at www.LavenderMagazine.com. The stats show us that more of you are coming to the website and you're staying longer, which means that we're doing something right.

3.) The iPad and iPhone apps are booming. People are seeing that they can get the latest issue of *Lavender* delivered right to their devices and that we actually add more content to it, including clickable web links and embedded videos. And, that same Online Magazine with its links and videos is viewable at any computer and on any smartphone. You can get *Lavender* wherever you can get internet connection.

4.) Our online interactions are growing. Facebook and Twitter followers increased by 44% this last year. Excellent. We're getting messages to you in a more timely and relevant manner, trying to match the message with the medium. That means more content in different ways to more people.

5.) We see more of you. You're appearing at events and commenting on Facebook posts. You're sharing our links, retweeting our tweets, and showing up in our online photo galleries. You're sending in critiques and you're passing along props. This means we're becoming the interactive community that we've wanted—and needed—to be. You're hopefully feeling our credibility increase as we've embraced transparency and discussion. We're nothing without our community and your feedback is crucial.

6.) The ads tell a story, too. When you look at our publication, know that it is possible because of the advertising. The growth in diversity of advertisers both online and in print this year means that more businesses are seeing worth in this audience, whether it be as a financial power or as market influencers or any other reason. And, more people are seeing our publication as a vehicle for reaching this audience. Look to them as resources that believe in you and this community.

The challenges are fairly easy to identify, too, but I've had a revolving list of those going since Day 1. The most basic challenge is to provide an attractive and relevant lifestyle publication for the GLBT community (and its allies) of the Twin Cities, Minnesota, the region, and the whole World Wide Web. No big thing.

So, looking at the next 26 issues, I challenge us all to continue to grow as an interactive community. Seek out conversations. Defeat harmful political campaigns. Remember that there is a whole online world of content at your fingertips that doesn't rely on a press and that allows you more of a voice.

And, when you get down and out, look at the kitty on this cover and sit in a moment of "Awww." It'll do you good.

With thanks,
Andy □

LETTERS |

ELLEN KRUG

I'm writing in response to Ellen Krug's recent *Skirting the Issues* column, "A Different Opinion." Ms. Krug's comment, "It's not necessary to destroy something in order to change it," resonated strongly for me. The easy way out is always to dismantle/blow up the existing situation. As we know, some of the more ardent activists are in favor of totally destroying the current oppressive "system."

I'm certainly not denying that the "system" is flawed, corrupt, often unfair, and systemically racist/sexist/ageist/heterosexist. However, I would submit that fomenting revolution in the streets and throwing the baby out with the bathwater probably won't solve all of our dilemmas or make mainstream society appreciate us more. Per Ms. Krug's suggestion, I would also submit that a better pathway to lasting results will only emerge from responsible, thoughtful leadership that seeks out new ideas and embraces more accessible ways of making progress.

The wild-eyed revolutionary is a shopworn cliché that, for many of us, just doesn't work. Today's difficult times and tough, complex situations require smart, conscientious leaders who can articulate 1) a way to improve things for everyone and 2) speak to the human values that must necessarily undergird and strengthen any successful initiative toward inclusion, equality, and justice.

Blowing up the "system" may feel good for the moment, but in the long run, the only things that truly change a culture are education and training. We have to center our dialogue around values and commonalities. We must focus on building consensus and supporting leaders who can provide the vision, methodologies, and ethical worldview needed for the long haul. In the end, we WILL win—not because we're better than our oppressors or more intrinsically valuable as human beings, but because the forces of equality and justice are inherently stronger than those of oppression and bigotry.

VANESSA SHERIDAN
APPLE VALLEY

MAGIC MIKE PRIDE COVER

I write a letter of disappointment and missed opportunity today. When *Lavender Magazine* posted on Facebook that the Pride issue was out, I took you to task for a cover photo of Channing Tatum promoting Magic Mike. While my reaction may have been emotional at the moment, I am still overwhelmingly

Continued on page 11 ➔

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Think: Then Get Out and Vote

AFTER THE LANDMARK Supreme Court Decision June 28, opinions of the Court's 5-4 ruling pretty much came down on two disparate sides:

Either, "Whatever the politics, today's decision was a victory for people all over this country," (President Barack Obama, speaking on national television from the White House), or, "If we want to get rid of ObamaCare, we're going to have replace President Obama," (Mitt Romney, Republican Presidential candidate, who vows, should he win in November, to repeal the law).

Other hot-button issues for Minnesotans—certainly for GLBT citizens—are the amendment to make same-sex marriages illegal in this state, and proposed voter IDs. Of course, there are already laws on the books prohibiting same-sex marriages, but to reinforce discrimination into our state constitution would be a black mark on Minnesota.

Pride has joyously come and gone, and tens of thousands attended: gays, lesbians, bisexual, trans, questioning, allies—the whole spectrum—those participating in the parade (including Governor Mark Dayton and Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, borne on a motorcycle holding a "Vote NO" Minnesotans United for All Families sign), and those enjoying the crush in Loring Park. But the question is, what per-

centage of the thousands will actually go to the polls and vote? Donations are great—and needed—but voters in the booths are what will determine the outcome.

It's clear that the upcoming election will have conflicting pulls and pushes for many individuals, ethnicities, religions, and parties. Some, for example, may want to nix voter ID cards for themselves, but may also want, because of religious or other personal beliefs, to prevent certain fellow citizens from marrying.

Gays and lesbians already can't marry in Minnesota, and the coming vote won't change that. What a yes vote *will* do is open the door for future and ever more discriminatory constitutional amendments affecting larger and larger segments of Minnesota citizens.

Before casting a vote to change the state constitution to alienate a fair percentage of individuals who constitute family, friends, and co-workers, it would be wise to check and see what laws and restrictions might next target your own Achilles heel.

There is no neat, snappy ending to this piece: that will be a much more complex sentence, authored for posterity by voters on November 6. □

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disappointed in your cover and the follow-up response. The response was along the lines of: an exclusive interview with Channing that fell through and at the eleventh hour, a decision was made to go with the cover that was prepped.

This explanation actually disappoints me more. Even if you had an exclusive with Channing, the Pride edition cover of your magazine still should have been relevant to Pride. This is our fortieth year of Pride. **This is a big deal!** We are in the middle of an Equality battle, and you chose to run a cover that plays to stereotypes: hot men, sexy bodies, and pop culture sell. This cover needed to reflect our history, our current movement, and our future.

Lavender is resource for our community! You have an obligation to our community to be a beacon of hope guiding our community. I hope your editorial staff reflects on this moment and asks themselves what is truly important to them.

**DEREK HARLEY
MINNEAPOLIS**

MAKING FRIENDS

My partner and I had the good fortune of being able to visit your beautiful city this past weekend to attend the Pride festivities throughout your city.

On Saturday Morning we went to a local eatery for breakfast finding the only open seating was at the bar, which we happily accepted. Shortly after we ordered, a man and woman sat next to us and also ordered. When our breakfast arrived they gave it to the other couple by mistake; we laughed, said it was ours which the waiter didn't hear and took it back to the kitchen. Well, it started an amusing conversation, one we were so happy about. Sitting next to us was your very own columnist Ellen Krug from *Skirting the Issues* and a longtime friend of hers.

What followed was a wonderful, unexpected breakfast with someone who more than represented your magazine wonderfully well but also Pride and the City of Minneapolis. She was informative, funny, sincere, and interested in our story. She gave us advice on several things we talked about and did so with much compassion and a newfound feeling of friendship. Her friend was also just as welcoming; the two made our breakfast so enjoyable—but that's not the end of it. Later in the day in Loring Park, who came up to us out of thousands of people? Yes, you've got it: our new found friends. What a beautiful memory for us to take home to Green Bay with us.

I can see why *Lavender* is such a successful magazine when it's written by such wonderful people!

MIKE DURAN

IAN ALEXANDER State Representative 59B AUGUST 14th PRIMARY



Dear Friends and Voters,

As a family law attorney and investigator for the civil rights commission, I have seen how LGBT Minnesotans are often treated as second class citizens. As a resident of the North Side and person of color myself, I know the personal hurt this discrimination causes and the negative impacts it has on our community as a whole.

That is why I joined the fight for marriage equality months before I decided to run for the Legislature. And if I win the August 14 primary, my campaign will work as hard to turn out as many "no" votes as possible on the marriage amendment as it does on my own election.

I am proud to have the support of many District 59B voters, friends and families and I ask for your vote in the DFL primary on August 14.

Ian Alexander, DFL Candidate for 59B

ENDORSEMENTS

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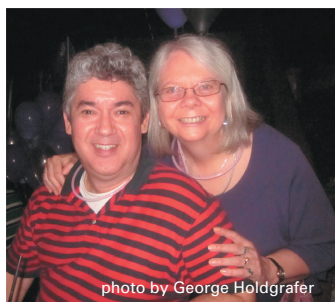


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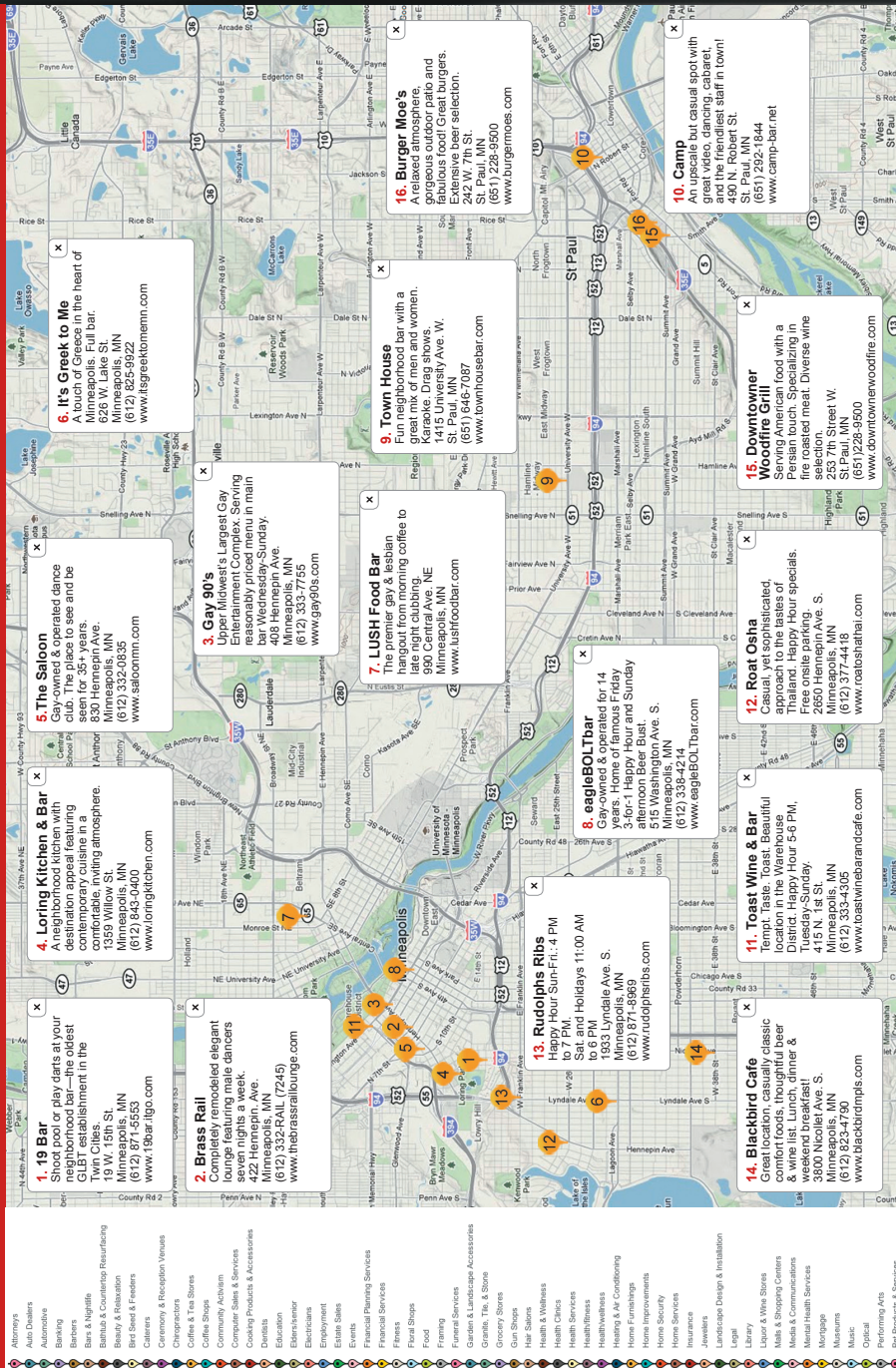
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SPOTLIGHT ON THE 'QUEER' FRINGE FESTIVAL | John Townsend



Even Yours. Photo by Avey Alexandres

If you want great opportunities to see queer-oriented performing arts work by local and national artists, the Minnesota Fringe Festival offers that at 15 various venues throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul from Aug. 2 through 12. Check their website, www.fringefestival.org, to see where shows are playing because sometimes assigned venues change. Be assured that if you catch several queer shows—which all last no more than an hour—you will feel empowered with new information, new perspectives, and new energy.

EVEN YOURS

Playwright Gemma Irish examines the problem of infidelity. She shares, “I thought I was writing a play about two people—a married man and his female friend—who can’t control their desire for one another. But the more we dig into the story, the more I realize that this is also a play about two women, about female friendship, the male gaze, and systematic disempowerment.” Director Amanda White employs what she calls “lyrical movement” in the actors’ execution of the script. Actor John Bennett says, “I think if we did the story completely silently and only with movement it would have a similar effect.”

STORMS BENEATH HER SKIN

Chicago transgender performer Rebecca Kling says her one person show “explores the one thing everyone thinks they know about trans women: The Surgery, capital T, capital S. But while most people know about The Surgery, they don’t know what it involves—the process itself, the emotional and mental journey it takes to decide to undergo knife cutting flesh. I think that taboo mystery is unhealthy, damaging to a safe life as a trans woman, and so I try to demystify. I explain, in very frank and straightforward terms, what my process has been, what I’m excited about, and what I dread. And, hopefully, everyone leaves with a more human, and less ‘Jerry Springer’ idea of what it’s like to move through the world as a trans woman.”

TALES FROM A TWISTED UNIVERSE

Playwright Mic Weinblatt has developed his own vibrantly overblown comedic style that’s reminiscent of the great ’60s film icons like actor Peter Sellers and director Blake Edwards. He has a way of turning supreme silliness into a pathway to understanding how controlled we are by sexual and gender stereotypes. Two of the plays in this set are queer-oriented. *Gesundheit* is about a chance encounter at a cafe where an eager, lonely man reaches out to a stranger after a sneeze and learns his secret. *A Lovely Day For A Polar Bear* has a biblically-inclined woman and a contemplative man clash at a zoo, of all places.



A Comedy of Edits. Photo by Amy Duncan Lingo

A COMEDY OF EDITS

Acclaimed lesbian storyteller Allegra Lingo has co-written her first actual play with out gay writer Taylor Brorby, whose commentaries on the marriage amendment have appeared on Minnesota Public Radio’s website and the Star Tribune. Lingo and Brorby play the characters ‘The Writer’ and ‘Stephen’. While stuck on a hotel balcony overlooking the Atlantic, they keep company with such fabulous figures as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, mermaids, and Mick Jagger. Lingo says the show’s “undercurrent revolves around the courage necessary to live and work authentically, not swayed by the whims of the external audience. It’s not an easy task, whether someone strives for that authenticity in their creative work or their identity, but I think those who are successful are the ones who are able to experience and live life to the fullest extent.”



Dead Wrong. Photo by Katherine Glover

DEAD WRONG

What happens when a lesbian who has been assaulted suspects she may have misidentified her attacker? That's what drives lesbian writer/performer Katherine Glover's new solo play. She plays a character named Megan Shepard, who, as Glover puts it, tells the story "first, of an assault and its aftermath and later, of her discovery that the man she sent to prison may, in fact, be innocent. The idea was to look at how wrongful conviction affects other people, not just the wrongfully imprisoned, but also their families, and the crime victims, and even the people in law enforcement who are responsible for the mistake. It's a story that's not told as often."

THE LOVE SHOW

The Dirty Curls have found their local niche as a naughtybilly comedy band with such instruments as banjo, guitar, and ukulele. Curl Grrrl Courtney McClean says this family-friendly show is "about love! Love of people, cats, people's right to love each other, objects we love (like body pillows), and stupid things we do for love. We will most certainly comment about the vote coming up in November." Get ready for fighting cats, untimely bodily functions, and love's collision with donuts.

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SPOTLIGHT



Font of Knowledge. Nathaniel Kent and Ariana Venturi. Photo by Hunter Canning

FONT OF KNOWLEDGE

New York-based Shelby Company glories in what playwright Jonathan A. Goldberg calls “a big fast-paced campy farce that celebrates the 1950s and plays off the tropes, styles, and quirks of ’50s movies from noir to sci-fi to Douglas Sirk.” The heroes include a washed up typesetter and a sexy librarian who ward off wolf-man communists, a madwoman whose hands have been locked away, and a mysterious playboy war hero named Sam Serif. Also, Dwight Eisenhower runs around with a fake mustache. Rod Kinter has staged the fights with slapstick in mind: rubber chickens, sausage links, robots.

TOPIC OF CANCER

Queer-identified playwright Kaylynn Raschke’s farce is about two sisters on the eve of their father’s 70th birthday. The older one is into food and stars in a reality TV show. The younger is a has-been Hollywood starlet. Through an odd turn of events, the lesbian producer of the reality TV show gets entangled in a sort of love triangle with the sisters. And hints of a same-sex wedding occur. In the midst of all this are concerns that the ex-starlet has breast cancer. Raschke says her play “challenges you to think about what is forgivable in the face of mortality.” □

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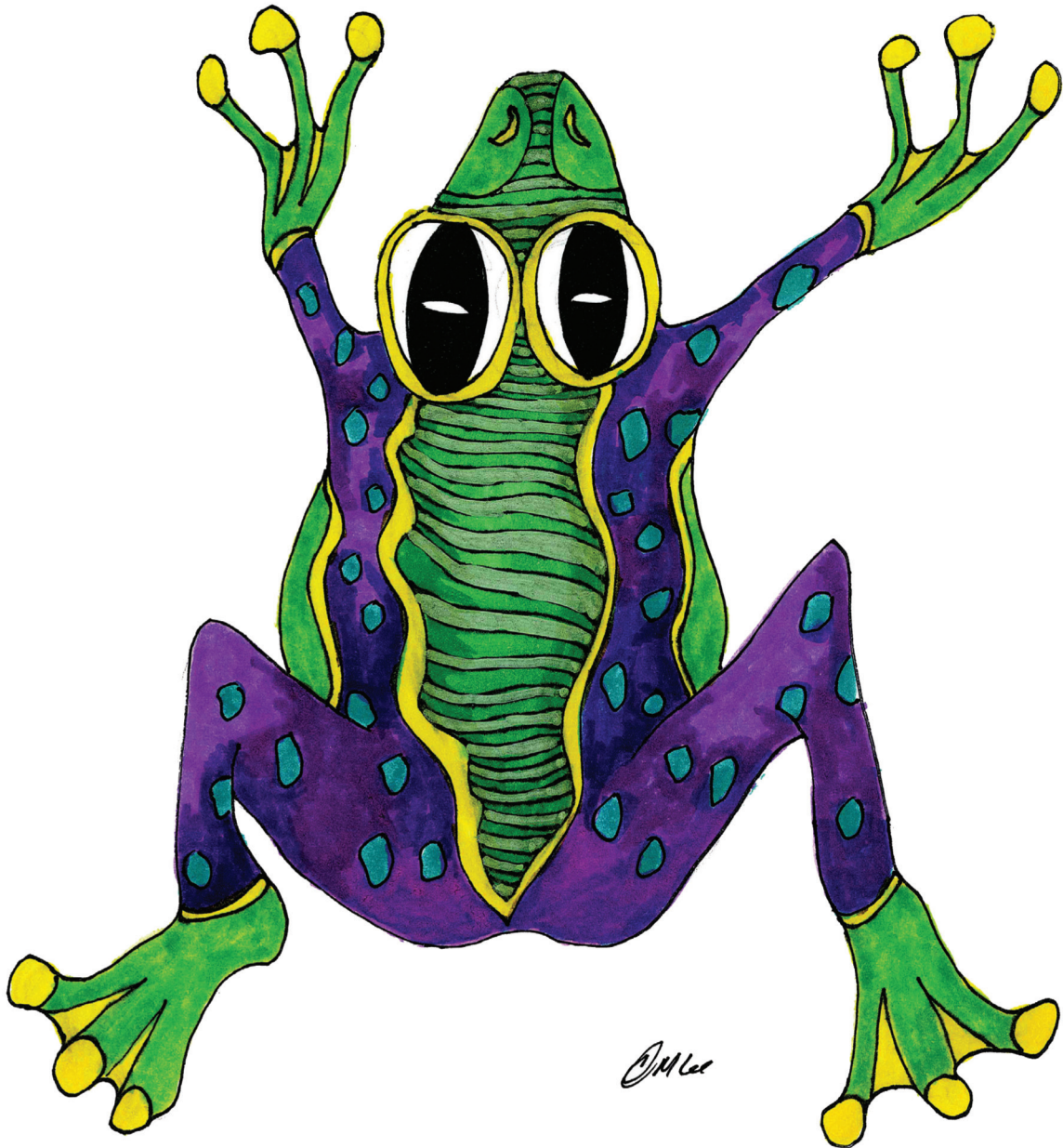
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Romantic Kylemore Abbey, Ireland. Photos by Carla Waldemar

IRELAND 2012

“WITH 50 MILLION Irish in America,” opines our guide, “we should be the 51st state.” Plus, 23 of 44 U.S. presidents claimed Irish blood. And that doesn’t include O’Bama.

The story of Ireland is a story of migration—both in and out: red hair from Viking marauders and Norman castles from the French. But it was domination by the British—the 1% of the day—that caused the most hardship, culminating in the Rebellion and Civil War.

Galway was a prime departure point. Columbus stopped by to gain bearings from a map of a crossing centuries earlier, still on view in St. Nicholas Church. Recently, Woody Harrelson made the voyage in reverse for a bit of R&R at Galway’s luxe Niall Lodge, where the food alone is worth the journey, even if you have to swim (see online sidebar on food).

Dan O’Hara’s cottage is a wee bit less posh. It’s preserved at Connemara Heritage and History Centre, a tribute to the farmer evicted during the potato famine of the 1840s—the Holocaust of Ireland—and

forced to migrate to America on one of the notorious coffin ships, so named for the fate of its passengers. Dan’s wife and most of their seven kids died enroute.

Today, Martin, blue eyes twinkling, lends his tenor to the ballad of Dan aside the cottage’s turf fire, then pours us a drop of potshen, the gut-blazing moonshine of the day. Martin then shoulders a spade to demonstrate how Ireland’s peat bogs—nearly 20 percent of the land—are cut into logs of turf to serve as fuel. Our driver, John, reminisces, not altogether fondly, about that annual summer exercise on the family farm.

A turf fire welcomes us to Renvyle House, once site of a powerful Celtic chieftan, and since 1883, host to more modern potentates—politician Churchill, poet Yeats, writer Joyce—and moi. I’m strolling the shore where a pewter-colored sea muscles the boulders as clouds slide across purple mountains. Grab a bike, golf club, or kayak before setting out for Kylemore Abbey.

The romantic Gothic Revival mansion was built in 1867 by a millionaire for his bride. Later a girls’ school for the likes of

once-pupil Angelica Huston, it’s now convent to 12 elderly nuns and open to tour. Take a turn around the intricately-patterned walled garden before heading on.

We pass Croagh Patrick, Ireland’s holy mountain, where Patrick, its patron saint, spent 40 days fasting and praying. But—thank goodness—no fasting was to be had in Westport, our destination. Winner of Ireland’s annual Tidy Town competition, the high street glows with newly-painted shopfronts in all shades of the rainbow, including the lipstick-red of Matt Molloy’s. Yes, the owner, of Chieftans fame, frequently plays here. Tap your toes—there’s no resisting—while the fiddle, mandolin, squeeze box, and flute percolate a lively ditty. Molloy’s offers yet another claim to fame for pouring the best Guinness to be had, pulled by a barman who knows what he’s doing. Slowly, slowly. A rest to settle the foam. Then a top-up and “Slainge” (Cheers).

Next morning, we don our Wellies and head for Ballycroy National Park, launched in 1998 to showcase, and preserve the panoramic Atlantic blanket bog—a vast, un-

inhabited terrain of 11,000 acres. “How’re youse?” inquires Denis Strong, who leads us to the Visitors Centre to explore its interactive exhibits. Push a button, and Winnie, via video, explains her childhood’s cookery—churning butter, cooking boxty (potato pancakes), killing and curing the pig. Then Denis takes us walking the bog itself—like slipping about on a soggy trampoline, past turf cutters stacking peat logs into pyramids.

Then on to Achill Island, its 3,000 inhabitants dwarfed by the wild moors and majestic cliffs that hem them—also victim to the infamous famine. We visit the deserted village of Slievemore, settled since 4,500 B.C., declares Jerrod Mangan, pointing to prehistoric burial tombs. We scramble among the 50 tumbling stone cottages, once housing families of 10 and their cattle: one tiny window (larger=more tax), a hole in the roof (chimney=tax), whose thatch was burnt by absentee landlords when evicting families unable to pay rent, much less feed their families. Then on to also-impooverished Adergoule and its new Titanic Memorial.

Why here? Because, in the famine’s lingering aftermath, there were no jobs, no money. So 14 of its sparse populace booked steerage on the Titanic in search of a better life. Eleven perished. But this is more than just another Titanic story. As guide Alex Nolan deepens the tragedy, men left behind, without jobs, couldn’t marry. Girls faced spinsterhood. Those leaving were given an emigrant’s wake—a final party, for they’d never see their families again.

Today, the church bell rings at 2:30 a.m. every April 15. Inside, stained glass windows depict the disaster. And a new park, centered by bronze figures of those emigrants, shows the hull of the ship; a hearth, center of an Irish home; and a gable with open window, signaling a welcome, should any return.

Foxford Woolen Mills, back on the mainland, is more than just a gorgeous shopping op; it’s also a symbol of a turnaround in Ireland’s fortunes. Here a nun, sent to teach those in misery, put first things first: jobs for the hungry. Strong-willed and foresighted, she envisioned harnessing the river to power a woolen mill employing town-folk and strong-armed even wary Protestants into making it happen. Today, the mill offers an interactive history tour as well as must-haves for home and body.

Foxford’s blankets grace the beds at Mount Falcon, a gorgeous estate-turned-hotel that’s Eden for outdoors types: clay pigeon shooting, golf, water sports, and my tamer choice, fly fishing. Owner Shay makes

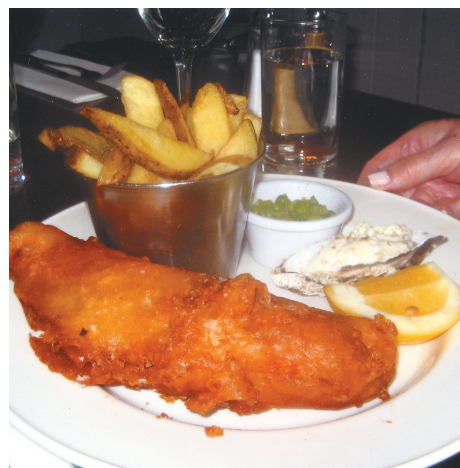


(Clockwise from top left) Craggy landscape. Martin, at Dan O'Hara's stone cottage - evicted during potato famine. Patriots grave, Glasnevin Cemetery.

sure I succeed and handles the “release” part of the deal, thank goodness. Afterward, relax in the spa.

Then off to Dublin, where we trace Ireland’s history a final time at Glasnevin Cemetery, established in 1832, where 1.5 million lie buried—everyone from the heroes of the Rebellion to ex-mayor LaGuardia, playwright Brendan Behan, Joyce’s parents. Here Michael Collins of The Rebellion (Liam Nisson in the film) is memorialized, and atop a mass paupers’ grave, the stone of Parnell: statesman, hero. To salute them, we retire across the street to Kavanaugh’s, aka Gravediggers’ Pub, where it’s “Howya? How ya keepin’?” as we lift a final pint.

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IRELAND 2012

Ireland Reinvents its Kitchen

GALWAY IS HAILED as the cultural capital of Western Ireland—great theater, music galore—but I'm here for the food. Oysters and mussels practically leap from the bay, and McDonough's pub has served up fine fish and chips since 1902. But at Niall House, a charming rental estate, our catered lunch proved the best of a long list of dining bests on a recent tour of Western Ireland. Worth the flight? Heck, I'd swim.

"Irish cuisine" is an oxymoron no more. Niall's help-yourself platters set out to prove, for once and for all, that the dreary days of boiled cabbage and gamey mutton are long gone. Food today is fresh as its taxi drivers' lip, all micro-locally sourced, and spared the weight of heavy sauces. Grass-fed beef and lamb prevail, along with just-caught seafood, Irish butter (better than all others), and myriads of cheeses.

We loaded our plates with smoked mackerel, salmon, and sweet potted crab served with seaweed marmalade, then returned for salamis and cured meats. Next, an endless galaxy of cheeses, from Cashel Blue to goat and beyond. Just when we were ready to surrender to days on the treadmill, out came the homemade rhubarb pie with enough whipped cream to paint my kitchen. Oh, and Irish coffee. Meanwhile, on an old recording, Bing Crosby crooned "Galway Bay." Out with the hankies.

Chef Tim O'Sullivan, a 30-year vet at Renvyle House, an active member of Euro-toques, and front-runner for this year's Best Chef in Ireland award, chatted with me over a breakfast of salmon Benedict and lambs' liver with homemade soda bread. Says Tim, "Modern Irish cooking is lighter and fresher, using local products, but still referencing our roots: Grannie's food redefined. Desserts are lighter, such as last night's parfait. Grannie's lowly boxty has evolved into a potato-herb cake. Scallops are another good example of how things have evolved: I serve them, carpaccio style, with apple-lime jelly." And panache.

The crab cakes, over which I'd swooned at dinner, came brightened with a most modern melon and cucumber salsa. My neighbor worshiped her miniature pot pie of Conne-

mara mussels and fennel, while across the table, another swooned over a galette of goat cheese with onion relish.

Next, entrees such as filet of beef, with a spinach-mushroom potato cake replacing boxty, aside a puddle of tarragon béarnaise. Or sea bass paired with ratatouille. Local duck comes further enriched with an onion-apricot stuffing. As for those "lighter" desserts, there's that iced strawberry parfait with blueberry coulis. Or go for the apple tart or berry trifle. Or, Lord love ye, why not the chocolate mousse?

Sure, and this is a very special kitchen. But join the cafeteria line among the tour bus crowd at attractions such as Kylemore Abbey and Foxford Woolen Mills, and get set for house-made everything, down to the jam and butter—no shortcuts. Salmon and spinach quiche vies with crab salad and open-faced sandwiches of smoked salmon on brown bread.

Soup, such as the rich and tasty tomato-basil at Glasnevin Cemetery's Visitor Centre, gave the genre a whole new meaning. The Beehive, on tiny Achill Island, baked its pies from rhubarb that grew fertilized with seaweed, which sweetened the tart stalks. The mountain of whipped cream didn't hurt, either. Ballycroy Park's modest little food line managed to produce the scone to end all scones—light as a helium balloon and served with homemade preserves and clotted cream. Lots of it.

Westport is not only the tidiest of sweet towns, as its award declares, but also one of the tastiest. A newly-launched, unpretentious bistro called An Bon Port won Newcomer of the Year award for a kitchen that turns out a string of winners, starting with the starters. Thanking its local purveyors in print, as do many these days, its menu offers a warm salad of pot-roasted pigs' cheeks on black pudding with apple-vanilla sauce. Just as luscious is the Achill smoked organic salmon, served upon a slim slice of boxty, with more black pudding and onion marmalade. Crab cakes came livened with curried mango chutney and partnered with grilled scallops in hollandaise; all victuals from just outside the kitch-

en door presented with flair and imagination but never over-kill.

The entrees aren't for slouches, either. More scallops, this time prepared with local rapeseed oil and grilled fennel. Also, pan-fried trout paired with mussels and lamb with ratatouille.

Across the street, another charmer, Sol Rio, offers a bistro bargain of three courses for 26 euros. What to choose? The tiger prawn and crab on salad greens, or the beet and goat cheese salad spangled with cashews? Next settle on a mixed grill of Irish beefsteak wrapped in bacon aside a Westport lamb chop and portobellos; duck confit with cassoulet beans; or sole gratin. The dessert you're wise to pounce on is the apple pie laden with ice cream. And whipped cream. The Irish hold no fear of calories.

Amid Mount Falcon's 100 green acres, some folks popped at pigeons (clay) while I, with a boatload of help from fisherman Shay, cast for trout. Neither appeared on the evening's menu. The kitchen's talented young French chef, Philippe ("Irish products, French heart"), had better things on offer. He didn't win County Mayo's Best Chef 2012 (and Best Hotel Restaurant) for nothing. Consider starters like black pudding with pork belly and seared scallops, caramelized apples, applesauce, and warm apple jelly. Or a salad of asparagus, poached egg, oyster mushrooms, and truffle foam. Or parfait of chicken liver and foie gras served with rhubarb chutney.

Convinced? Next up, choose between—and you can hardly bear to—a combo of rack of lamb and lamb shoulder with wild garlic; trout with marinated prawns and tomato chutney; duck breast with five-spice honey and puree of black grapes; and, of course, local Hereford beef alongside braised beef tortellini, all vivaciously fresh, intensely and proudly local, and trumpeting true flavor.

Note that these are all small, countryside kitchens far from the fast lane of dashing, debonair Dublin. That fair city is so loaded with Michelin stars that there's no need of streetlights. But that's another story. Next year.... ◻

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**HEIDI BARTON STINK*****In Our Guts***

The local transgender activist and hip-hop artist unleashes her debut full length, an angry broadside willing to tackle any and all topics at hand. Over the spare but driving production of *See More Perspective*, Stink lays down the law. “Health care and a place to sleep/We love and some food to eat” she raps at the top of “Direct Action,” before cutting into the issues that most of us face in modern America. This is punk rock filtered through hip hop, shooting for the bracing honesty of the first and the compelling narratives and driving beats of the second. Stink gets rapping help here from the album’s producer and rising artist Guante on several tracks, including “Won’t Let Ya Slide” and late-album standout “Intersecting Lines.”

**HOT CHIP*****In Our Heads***

The latest from London dance mavens takes a bit to warm up. In fact, it isn’t until halfway through, with the single “Night and Day,” that the band finds the off-kilter funk that has fueled previous efforts. Prior to that, *In Our Heads* is something more sublime, as the group works through a number of styles on their way to more familiar territory, from the Pet Shop Boys-like “Motion Sickness” to the 80s-pop bounce of “Don’t Deny Your Heart.” Still, it’s the back half that is more arresting, as the London-based act pushes their sound into deeper and darker electronic spaces and is perfectly brought together in the slow burning and building “Flutes” or the equally epic “Let Me Be Him,” which is aided by a bit of real passion.

**METRIC*****Synthetica***

No amount of bouncy beats and earwig-worthy melodies can cover up the darkness inhabiting Metric’s latest album. “I’m just as fucked up as they say” singer Emily Haines coos at the top of the album on “Artificial Nocturne.” From there, the album features a lot of harrowing self-examination. That extends to the listener. If you happen to purchase a physical copy of the CD, you’ll find the lyrics are printed backwards and require a mirror to actually read. Musically, the Canadian band is in top form throughout, merging an electronic, new-wave vibe with plenty of touches of modern rock, crafting an engaging sound for all the introspection. Lou Reed, a father of both styles, even shows up to add some gravitas to “The Wanderlust.”

**JUSTIN BIEBER*****Believe***

In technical terms, Bieber’s second album is “weak sauce.” No number of guest spots from the likes of Ludacris, Big Sean, or Nicki Minaj is going to change that fact. The freshly-minted adult is just too squeaky clean to pull off any kind of musical grit. That means his sophomore album drags on and on and on with lots of robotic beats and nods to modern pop without producing much in the way of charm or grace. That his voice—supposedly Bieber’s calling card—is auto-tuned to death doesn’t help the proceedings. Sure, there’s a nice groove here and there, “Out of Town Girl” has a pseudo-reggae vibe that is almost beguiling, but the album’s dreary sameness wears away any charm. □

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Devil's Advocate



Spending a few minutes with the enigmatic Erik Forsberg, it's clear he's not someone who turns tail and runs from a challenge. Nothing can deter him from his vision for the new Devil's Advocate. It seems they went through so many more setbacks than average new restaurants often face. As they were working in the kitchen, a gap was discovered between the wall and the floor, which essentially meant that the floor was in danger of giving way to the basement. They converted the basement into usable space which also holds their impressive amount of kegs.





(Clockwise from left) Happy
Hour menu; Falafel; Owner
Erik Forsberg; Bowl of Balls.
Photos by Mike Hnida

The restaurant space which most recently held the Inn has been given a gentle facelift. There are new floors and, in the front window, a space for seating that will also double as a stage. A stage? In this part of town? “Absolutely,” responds Forsberg. He’s hoping to bring in some Bluegrass/Blues/Acoustic local musicians and continue the tradition of live music that he had started at his last restaurant, the Ugly Mug.

It was difficulties with the Ugly Mug space that led him to the new restaurant. After years of struggling to keep that restaurant running close to his vision (including just trying to keep the air conditioning working, which he says the building’s owner refused to fix, leaving his customers sweltering), he decided that it was time to begin anew.

The menu is another place where Forsberg felt he needed to fight for his vision. The food is dominated by balls. Meatballs with worldly seasonings paired with inspired sides. The original chef couldn’t quite find the groove, but the staff in place now is having some fun—and it’s evident on the plate. The traditional meatballs have a nice amount of salt in them, which makes an eater eagerly reach for one of their beers. In a rich tomato sauce, they taste like someone’s nonna spent hours fussing over them. The falafel is dense, smooth in texture, and served alongside some fregola



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SLICE



The Double.

(a textural sibling to couscous) mixed with fresh mint; it's a light, refreshing bite. The way Forsberg sees it, the flavor options are endless. On our visit, they were talking about possibly doing a *banh mi* style meatball.

What sounds like a gimmick tastes like a good idea. These small, easy-to-eat bites of food are just begging for a beer. They have over 60 taps and a staff well-educated in their brews. They will be doing many beer dinners, where real aficionados can sip and eat a more refined menu.

At its heart, the Devil's Advocate is a neighborhood pub, something this part of town could use. There's a great happy hour, speedy lunches, and plans for more elaborate dinners. They lead with the beer list, but there's also a well-selected wine list and plans for craft cocktails. They're still finding their footing, but as these plans come to fruition, it seems likely to find a comfy spot in the heart of the downtown worker. □

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NEWSY BITS

The Mall of America is a little hipper: **Masu Sushi & Robata**, the restaurant concept from Sushi Avenue and Tim McKee, opened last weekend.

The mega mall is also getting another local darling: **Cupcake** plans to open their second outpost there. After a failed negotiation for a space on Grand Avenue, and a win on the Food Network's Cupcake Wars, it's hard to believe that there's more fight left in owner Kevin Van Deraa, but he's moving forward with his sweet shop's expansion plans.

El Burrito Mercado has crossed the river. Their Minneapolis outpost inside Midtown Global Market opens today!

PrimeBar is now open, and early reviews are a bit curmudgeonly. It's hard to root for another chain landing in Uptown—the onetime hipster hood is now studded with them. The restaurant in the erstwhile Il Gatto space will have sliders, wings, beers and mojitos—nothing new, but a much needed facelift with a wide open view of the front windows and a middle of the road menu may very well serve a wide swath of shoppers. Only time will tell.

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Town House Owner Monnett Marks Dual Anniversary

Second Patio is Her Latest Triumph



Holly Monnett. Photo by George Holdgrafer

AUGUST 1 IS quite auspicious for Holly Monnett. On August 1, 1974, she began her tenure at The Town House in St. Paul, moving quickly from barback to bartender to manager by 1976. On August 1, 1987, she started her ownership of the popular bar, which has been a gay landmark since 1969. She's now the only gay-woman proprietor of a local GLBT bar.

As Monnett marks her silver anniversary at the helm of The Town House, with characteristic humility, she shifts attention away from herself when reminiscing on the establishment's phenomenal success over the years.

Monnett says, "It really doesn't seem that long. As our leader, I provide stability, plus a place for our magnificent staff—including our bartenders, entertainers, and others—to show their talents. It's really about the people I surround myself with."

Reflecting further, Monnett notes, "Throughout our long history, we've continually been able to change with the times. Our focus has always been on entertainment, low prices, and quality service. We provide a gathering place where everyone is welcome, and where they can afford to have fun when they're here."

Indeed, The Town House offers a weekly cornucopia of entertainment, including karaoke and impersonator shows, plus the original cheapie night Wednesdays.

As a devoted pet owner—her present canine companion is Buster—Monnett has hosted many fundraisers at the bar that have channeled thousands of dollars to local animal charities.

Since 2011, the light rail transit (LRT) construction on University Avenue by The Town House, which has been one of the greatest challenges ever for Monnett, has spurred her into action.

Last year, to counteract the loss of on-street parking, Monnett convinced the City of St. Paul to allow free customer parking in its lot adjoining the bar to the west.

Recently, overcoming persistent resistance from the city, Monnett built a nice second patio for the bar on the corner of the lot to replace space lost from the original patio because of LRT construction. It's sure to be a hit with patrons, especially smokers.

Known for her tenacity, Monnett states, "I won't take 'no' for an answer. As my late manager, Steven Anderson, used to say about me, I'm a very determined person."

That determination certainly has served Monnett well in her nearly four decades at The Town House, a quarter-century of which as owner. □

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The Wildcat Sanctuary

By Lannie Walker

THE SCENE IN Zanesville, Ohio, last October was like an animal Columbine. 49 animals including bears, lions, tigers, wolves, and a baboon all had to be shot and killed by authorities after a man freed them before committing suicide. Earlier this month, two chimps, the “pets” of a couple in Las Vegas broke out of their enclosures and were shot when they dared to roam free in the neighborhood. What did they think they were—wild animals or something? These two stories may be extreme examples, but I have recently learned how extreme the problem of exotic animals as pets is after visiting Tammy Thies in Sandstone, Minnesota.

Tammy runs The Wildcat Sanctuary, home to currently 115 animals from lions, tigers, cougars, and lynxes to a variety of hybrids (wildcats mixed with domestics). She is dedicated to the causes of stopping the practice of owning exotic animals as pets, rescuing those that she can, educating about appropriate pets, and moving

legislation to strengthen the laws surrounding animal breeding and owning of exotic species. On top of all that, she still found time to give me a tour of the “off-limits to visitors” sanctuary—off-limits because, as Tammy tells me, respite is required since almost all of the animals have gone through trauma...as well as to deter those wanting to “dump” their unwanted “pets” at the front gate. In fact, this is how many of the animals come the sanctuary, because their owners can no longer care for them. For many, getting a wild animal seems like a great idea but they don’t realize what it will take and just how large or powerful their cute furry kitten will become, or how their behavior will change when they become sexually mature.

Tammy was not always roaming across the 40-acre grounds beaming an optimistic smile in between recounting some the most horrendous circumstances surrounding the majestic creatures. She now lives on the property with (commuting home to her husband in



Wildcats in their sanctuary. Photos courtesy of The Wildcat Sanctuary and PCML Photography

the Twin Cities when she can). As a marketing executive in Atlanta in 1996, Tammy first crossed paths with a tiger cub and a leopard during a photo shoot. “And I was smitten just as you were today,” she says, sitting at the dining room table at the house on grounds that doubles as an office/headquarters. Learning how the animals were treated and that they were kept in 10' x 10' cages, she began volunteering at facilities that housed the cats and soon learned some harsh truths, “So many of these people were using these animals to their benefit, and when they didn't perform anymore, the animals got pushed aside.” It was in an attempt to save a tiger she'd met on a shoot that Tammy met Alfred Hitchcock muse and mother to Melanie Griffith, Tippy Hedron, who has a sanctuary in California. Inspired by the quality of Hedron's sanctuary, Tammy started her own in 1999, eventually moving back home to Minnesota, opening the refuge in Sandstone in 2006.

Titan, a massive male tiger, lolls on his back, flipping in the grass and soaking up the sun, the very picture of contentment. Nearby, his only “hunter” is his girlfriend Lilly, who watches him as she peers through the blades several feet away. Soon she pounces and Titan playfully bounces away only to double back and chase her as she gallops away in a gleeful display of flirtation. Titan and Lilly's lives were not always so carefree. Titan was rescued in 2006 after his brother, Tango, suffering from starvation and ate their owner Cindy Gamble not far from where the sanctuary now sits. Tango was destroyed, and Titan was placed at the sanctuary. It took a long time for Titan to recover from the trauma, says Tammy, but the

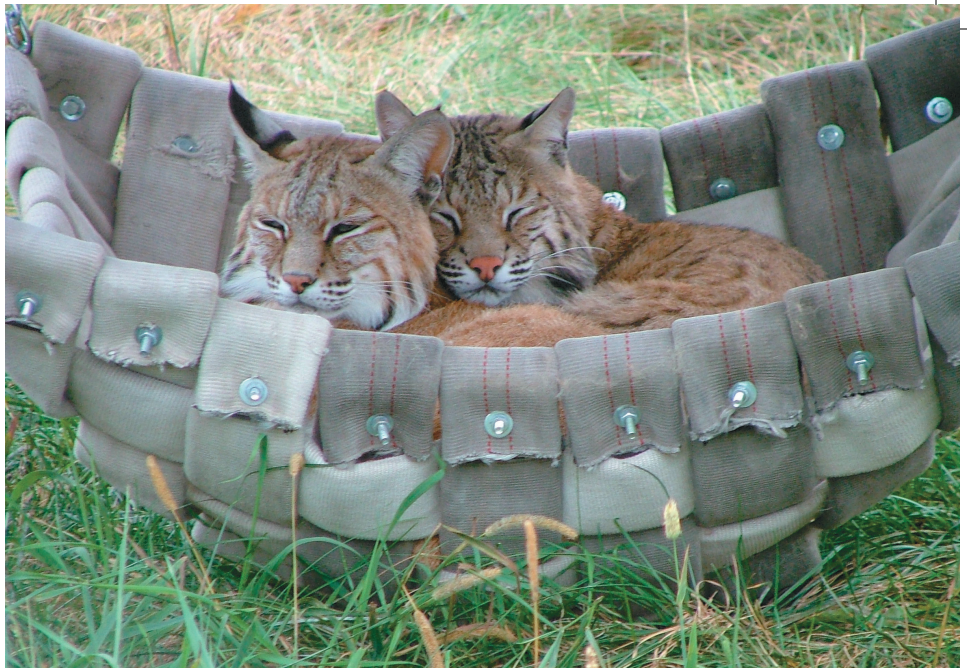
company of Lilly, who also has a dark past—including near starvation which forced her to eat her cage mate—has seemed to have helped immensely. The two were placed together in 2010 and the love affair, though somewhat unbalanced with Lilly being obviously more smitten, has provided a security and companionship that neither cat had experienced before. Even in the animal kingdom, it seems love can help heal all wounds.

We crunch past the love-birds' cage to a habitat where a sleek, earth-colored cougar named Tasha rounds the high grass and gracefully lopes along a fence, watching us intently. To my surprise, she answers Tammy's whistle with a whistle of her own, a bird-like chirp that one would not expect to come from such an imposing-yet seemingly friendly-animal. As we watch the cougar smile and dart through the grass, I remark on its beauty and Tammy nods in agreement but makes an important point: “I can guarantee if I went in there I wouldn't be coming out.”

That's perhaps the dilemma: the cats look so sweet that one can be lured into a false sense of security where cuddling the creatures seems harmless. Tammy recounts the harm that can come from close contact (humans are not allowed in pens at all with the wildcats at the sanctuary) and tells me about an acquaintance who was an advocate for keeping wildcats as pets. “She is about the fourth advocate for that organization... the other ones,” she pauses, “aren't here anymore.” Or the man wrote a book on how to privately own a wildcat with a second chapter titled “How to Not to Get Killed by Your Cats.” Unfortunately, this did not prevent him from meeting that very fate.


As we hike over to the habitat housing of white tigers she tells me she won't take me to anyone who is very aggressive. (Sounds good, Tammy.) Sierra's regal head pops up from the hammock she's lounging in. She affably trots into her indoor pen where she can relax in a cool place and we can visit with her up close, but safely. Once again, I am in awe of how gorgeous the cat is with caramel stripes running along snow white fur. Also in the habitat lives Nikita, equally breathtaking yet with a very different temperament. Relatively new to the sanctuary having just arrived a few months ago, Nikita was a photo shoot cat being constantly moved around to various fairs and chained down while people took her picture. Because of this past, if people stop and look at her, she starts hissing...which is exactly how she reacts to my presence that day. I keep my camera in its case. Tammy does not take me close to Nikita's enclosure, not just for my mental well-being but for Nikita's, which brings me to a point Tammy makes more than once during my visit: “It is not about what best for us humans. It's what's best for the animals.”

What's best for the animals starts with tougher laws aimed to protect them and the humans they may come in contact with. Tammy takes me for a thorough tour of the facilities which include a hybrid habitat, an onsite medical room where the cats are provided routine care by visiting vets, and a feed storage room where specialized diets are prepared to provide the necessary vitamins to insure a healthful life for the wildcats. In Minnesota since 2005, the law which Tammy helped lobby for prohibits the owning of bears, wildcats, or primates as pets, but several states such as nearby Wisconsin don't



have a similar law on the books. Tammy admits a patchwork of better state laws have surfaced but stresses the need for regulation at the federal level such as HR-4122, The Big Cat Safety and Public Protection Act, which would ban the breeding of big cats outside of the Association of Zoos and Aquarium system, a non-profit organization which regulates the treatment and breeding of exotic animals. The bill has yet to pass in part, says Tammy, because of opposition from organizations with big pockets such as Ringling Brothers Circus. And the laws that are in place can be hard to enforce as “A lot of this is underground. A lot of people have their pet bobcat in their basement.”

Taking the cause out in the open and working toward more exposure of what is happening in the world of exotic pet ownership and breeding in this country can help change that. With only 4500 tigers left in the wild, the irony that there is a surplus of tigers in captivity in the US of 6 to 10 thousand is astounding. “We are not the only ones that have rights in America, to me every living being should have rights and they need to be considered,” says Tammy in her passionate but even-keeled manner that belies none of the 'crazy cat lady' inferences one might impose. “It’s really inspiring to be part of something good,” she continues. “In the rescue business, people feel there is a lot of negativity and sadness, but I always remind people it only takes one person to abuse an animal but it takes a whole group of people to save one.” She smiles and adds a final fact: “We rely on donations and can only help the animals as much as people will help us.”

To learn more about the The Wildcat Sanctuary and how to help, please visit: www.wildcatsanctuary.org. 







IT'S A FURRY AFFAIR

How I went from being a Foe of Felines
to being a Cat Fanatic

by Kathleen Watson

He's waiting for me when I stumble in the door after a long day of work, green eyes flickering as I cross the threshold into my humble abode. As I drop my things and head down to my basement lair, he sprints ahead, anticipating our daily ritual. He beats me to my bed and leaps in. I flop down beside him and whisper for him to come closer. He snuggles into the crook of my arm, my hand slowly rubbing his cotton-soft belly. I feel him purr and his eyes close—perfection. As I'm dozing off, I feel a tiny paw reach around my arm and start to softly pet me. That's when I know. I'm in love.

I grew up in a household where the only thing worse than cats was the devil. With an extremely allergic mother and a father who was less than enthusiastic about any pets at all, I grew up without a furry friend to keep me company. My mother's opinions wore off on me: "Cats are filthy. Sneaky. Evil." I would avoid houses of friends who owned cats, and I continued my unjustified hatred of felines until well into my college years. So, when my new roommate told me she'd be bringing her cat Lucas, I was less than thrilled. But what started out as a terrifying trial has turned into a beautiful friendship between Lucas and me. We've



Photos by Karin Newstrom Photography, www.karinnewstrom.com

become each other's companions.

Lucas spent his first day cowering under the couch, terrified of anything that moved. I enjoyed his absence, assured that I could co-exist peacefully with this creature as long as I never had to see him. My roommate suggested that he spend the night in the utility room adjacent to my room so he could get used to where his litterbox and food were, and I agreed in an attempt to avoid waking up to a cat sitting on my face and trying to suffocate me (yet another horror story my mother used to terrify me). Though he made a little noise, I quickly drifted off to sleep and assumed that Lucas did the same.

The morning came, and I opened the door to the utility room, expecting Lucas to dash out and escape his temporary holding-cell. But he didn't appear. I searched high and low—in the cupboards, in the closets, under the laundry rack. Lucas was gone. I

panicked. How had I lost someone's cat in one day? Just when I was about to run upstairs and tell my roommate that her beloved cat vanished into thin air, I heard the most horrible howling coming from the back of the utility room. I cautiously approached, but there was no cat in sight. The howling continued until I realized that Lucas had fallen behind the dryer and got trapped.

I instantly pulled the dryer out—my whole body in rescue mode—and Lucas leapt out, his grey coat covered in several layers of dust. He immediately attached himself to my leg, covering my suit in dust bunnies and dirt. I scooped him up, relieved that this cat that I was determined to hate was alive and well. We've been inseparable ever since.

Since the rescue, as simple as it was, Lucas and I have been living in peaceful harmony. He demands my undivided attention and

gets jealous when I pay more attention to my girlfriend. I brag about how Lucas loves me best as I rub his tummy. Lucas is slowly taking over the house, and I'm slowly becoming accustomed to the fact that I will probably never get time alone in the bathroom again. (Telling Lucas that "Mama's having a private moment" does nothing, but I can't bear to completely lock him out.)

But there's still much I don't know about taking care of a cat. How do I know when something's wrong? How do I accommodate Lucas's personality without becoming a total pushover? How do I share a million photos of Lucas on Facebook without becoming a crazy cat lady? All joking aside, owning a cat for the first time is definitely a learning experience filled with joy and tension, but there are many resources that provide great advice on what to expect when bringing home a cat for the first time.

Continued on page 40 ➔



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Photos by Karin Newstrom Photography, www.karinnewstrom.com

Dr. Heidi Blackburn and Dr. Leslie Goldblatt, veterinarians at Golden Valley and Greenbrier Animal Hospitals, offer great advice for first-time cat owners. Dr. Blackburn believes it's important to know that "cats have distinctive individual personalities... some are very affectionate, others are not. Unlike dogs, their goal in life is not to please the owner but more to please themselves! Having said that, they can be extremely fun, playful, interactive, and entertaining! Keep your mind open to learning about your cat's personality rather than having a preconceived idea of exactly what you want your cat to be."

For busy people who still want a furry companion, getting a cat is a better choice than getting a dog that would require being let outside and being walked. Dr. Blackburn notes, however, that "if you are gone frequently for long hours, it would be nice for

your cat to live with another cat with which it gets along nicely." Though cats are more independent than dogs, they still require attention and affection, so owners should make sure that they are not simply dismissing their feline friends.

Before you get a cat, make sure that you're ready to be a responsible pet owner. Purchase litter boxes (Dr. Blackburn notes, "There is a general rule of thumb as far as how many litter boxes should be in the home with cats: it's one litter box per cat plus one) and other supplies before the cat comes home. Be aware that the cat will most likely be very timid at first and want to hide. Christina Rubio, a veterinary technician, recommends "keeping your cat in a quiet room, away from other furry members of the household for at least the first few days. This will allow your cat to not only adjust to you but to your home. Once your cat has

become adjusted to the room give it a little more freedom, slowly let it meet the other members of the household, introduce toys, etc. A slow adjustment is always best."

One important aspect of owning a cat is accommodating the cat's personality. If your personality conflicts with the personality of your cat, Dr. Goldblatt suggests a tactic used to solve disputes between humans: compromise. "Try to find common ground. If your cat is very rambunctious and you prefer a quieter pet, find some form of play that your cat enjoys that tires him out. Set regular play times that will hopefully be followed by quiet lap time."

Stacy, another veterinary technician, notes that "most cats are very independent; they like attention on their own terms, and it may be only for a short time." She suggests that you "get to know what your cat likes and doesn't like and respect that." Dr. Blackburn



adds, “In the rare case where a new cat and owner cannot meet halfway and accept or enjoy each other for what they are, it is the owner’s responsibility to find an excellent new home for the cat.”

Owning a cat requires work and responsibility, and cleaning out a litter box is anything but glamorous, but the love and affection shared between you and your pet surpasses the annoyance of the occasional stinky surprise. I know Lucas is waiting with open paws when I return home each evening, and he knows I’m coming home to him every night. It’s better than a relationship: we silently cuddle our issues out, and we give each other space when needed. Our friendship is based on trust. He trusts me to rescue him from behind the dryer, and I trust that not only will he never sit on my face and suffocate me in my sleep, but he’ll always be an affectionate friend at the end of each day. □

Are you interested in getting a new cat? Follow these helpful tips from the Veterinarians and Vet Technicians at Golden Valley and Greenbrier Animal Hospitals.

DO:

- Be aware of your cat’s usual habits and note small changes. Ask a vet if behaviors have changed.
- Play with your cat! Destructive behavior can be minimized with ten minutes of play.
- Feed your cat at meal time.
- Visit a vet at least once a year.
- Reinforce positive behaviors with treats.
- Provide other “scratchable” items to prevent your cat from scratching up furniture.
- Spay and neuter your cat.
- Ideally feed canned food as part of the daily food ration.

DO NOT:

- Don’t free feed. Allowing cats to eat from unlimited food whenever they want leads to obesity and a variety of other health problems.
- Do not let your cat roam around outside unless it is micro-chipped for easy identification and vaccinated. Most cats are and should be indoor pets. With coyotes becoming more prevalent in the suburban areas of Minnesota, it’s important to keep your cat inside. Cats and smaller animals are no match for coyotes, who can be violent and can carry diseases.
- Don’t assume that your cat is “simply being a cat” if it seems unhappy or cranky. Be aware and ask a vet if something seems off.
- Don’t assume that your cat doesn’t need attention. Cats require affection, so lavish it on them!

Pet Guide: Must-Haves for the (Hep)Cat

by Andy Lien



1



2



4



3



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5



6



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Photo by Karin Newstrom, www.karinnewstrom.com

5. Loyal Luxe Cat Cabin and Cat Tee Pee: Cats love cardboard and hiding spaces. Fun and design-forward, the Cat Cabin and Cat Tee Pee are must-haves for the whimsical cat owner. \$36.00, www.designboom.com. **6.** Petstages Snuggle Scratch and Rest/Petstages Soothing Cat Easy Life Hammock and Scratcher: Made of cardboard, your cat can both scratch and lounge in these colorful pieces by Petstages. \$15.27/\$17.92, www.amazon.com. **7.** SmartCat Bootsie's Bunk Bed and Playroom for Cats: An all-inclusive play and stay house for cats. Cats can play with the attached toys, scratch the top, and just lay down for a nap. \$29.99/durable wood construction, www.wag.com. **8.** Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed: With safety and comfort in mind, Sleepypod is a cat bed, carrier, car seat, and haven all in one. Plush lining and award-winning safety in multiple colors and sizes. \$179.00, www.sleepypod.com.



Leather and Politics, 2012

IT'S AN ELECTION year. And Chuck Renslow, founder and executive producer of International Mr. Leather and co-founder of the Leather Archives & Museum, would like to have a word with you.

On Sunday, May 27, at the beginning of this year's International Mr. Leather Contest and Show, Renslow made a speech in which he first implored audience members to document their personal history for the Leather Archives & Museum: "If it's not recorded, it cannot be saved."

Then Renslow's speech turned to politics: "A few weeks, ago during an election year, when it could hurt him the most, President Obama became the first president to champion gay marriage." This statement was met with over twenty seconds of wild cheering and applause from the audience. Then Renslow continued:

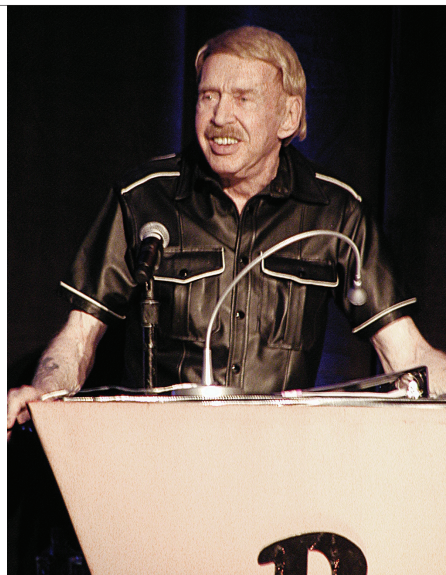
"As you can imagine, the right wing conservatives are energized. And the only way

to offset them is to become energized ourselves. More than any other time in your lives, you need to become active and involved in the campaign for the President of the United States."

"We need to re-elect President Obama this year. This year, the choice is between a history-making man who stands up for the gay community and tells the world we must have civil rights, or—or, if he is defeated, we will live under Mitt Romney, a self-described Mormon conservative who believes that marriage is for one man and one woman—even though at one time his religion espoused marriage between one man and several women."


"Now, in general, I support religious freedom and the freedom of choice. But when your freedom is used to deny me my freedom, you no longer represent me or my people."

"If you are not actively involved in helping



Chuck Renslow at this year's International Mr. Leather Contest and Show. Photo by Steve Lenius

to re-elect President Obama, you absolutely need to do it. Nothing less than the future of our civil rights is at stake." □



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AGAINST THE AMENDMENT

Interview with Ellie Bjorklund

LM: What is the role of a venue like First Avenue in the music industry, and what is your history in Minnesota?

Ellie: First Avenue has always focused on bringing people together through music. Because of our central location in downtown Minneapolis, we've been able to promote a strong music culture and community in the Twin Cities, across the state, and throughout the Midwest. And for the 42 years we've been open, we've become more than just a music venue, but a home to that community of music lovers and musicians alike.

LM: Why was it important for First Avenue to take a stand on the amendment?

Ellie: As a business that caters to a huge variety of people, we want everyone to feel welcome here. This has been a wonderful opportunity to ensure that people are not only aware of our inclusive environment, but also of our commitment of defeating this hurtful amendment.

LM: What have you been hearing from your staff about this amendment?

Ellie: This is an important issue to many of us personally, as we feel strongly about supporting the freedom to marry, equality, and human rights. We have a staff comprised of very compassionate people and our involvement in this campaign reflects their spirit and commitment.

LM: Many arts organizations are opposing the amendment. What do you think is motivating these various organizations?

Ellie: The music business, along with other arts organizations, is driven by creativity and passion. Our passion at First Avenue extends beyond live music to the wider community we serve. This is the case for many arts-based groups, and it's great to see so many of them banding together to defeat the amendment that would limit the freedom to marry for committed, same-sex couples in Minnesota.



LM: Recently First Avenue unveiled a new billboard opposing the marriage amendment. What has the reaction from the community been?

Ellie: In late June, we released the following statement via a billboard near downtown Minneapolis: "Don't limit the freedom to marry. First Avenue supports same-sex marriage and equality for all people."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. It's been especially successful online, with thousands of Facebook likes and re-posts, tweets, and appreciative and supportive comments. We hope that this effort brings awareness to this amendment, the importance of its defeat, and inspires others to action. □

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ADVOCATES AND ALLIES IN OFFICE: MINNESOTA PRIMARY 2012

By Kathleen Watson

With the upcoming primaries on the horizon and many important issues on the political docket, hopeful politicians around the state are fine-tuning their platforms and strengthening their campaigns. Being an informed voter is a must, and it takes time to research each potential candidate in order to make the correct decision for your values. The following hopeful politicians are just a few of the noteworthy candidates who are all in support of equality and GLBT rights. But their campaigns aren't simply about marriage equality—none of these candidates are simply “Rainbow” candidates. Their plans to improve education systems, the environment, and the economy show that they are dedicated to the future of this progressive and free-thinking state.



Photo courtesy of Ian Alexander

IAN ALEXANDER, DFL CANDIDATE FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISTRICT 59B

As a resident of North Minneapolis, Ian Alexander is excited about the prospect of representing Minnesota's 59th District, which is “the most economically, racially, and culturally diverse district in the state of Minnesota now. For me, representing this area would be a great privilege because I'd be able to represent a community that needs a lot of support from many different angles.”

One of the biggest factors motivating Alexander to run was the marriage amendment. “I'm really against the constitutional amendment that makes it impossible for people of

the same sex to become married couples. I'm a family law attorney, and I do a lot of adoptions—particularly in the last year involving LGBT couples. It seems like such an insulting thing to make it more difficult for people to adopt children and become loving families. It seems like the last thing the government should be getting involved in.” Born to a biracial couple shortly after interracial marriage was legalized, Alexander understands the importance of marriage equality.

“People that love one another should have the ability to get married. I think an amendment to make it even more difficult is just crazy. We don't evolve on our morality. We evolve on our understanding of morality and our understanding of loving relationships between people.”

Alexander is aware that simply increasing the budgets of schools won't fix every issue. He notes, “Minneapolis now has the highest achievement gap in the nation between African-American students and white students. It's not just funding that will solve this issue; there are fundamental things we all have to look at. A lot of it comes down to the way we teach, the tools we give the teachers to teach, class sizes, and early childhood investment. You need to invest in children at an early age because, when they formally enter the education system, a lot of the problems we have are children who are struggling to be at the same level as those who had more opportunity.”

Alexander also hopes to improve the economic situation in his district by enticing large businesses to relocate to the area, particularly

in North Minneapolis. He notes, “When you go to West Broadway, all you have to do is walk down the street and you'll discover that 90% of the businesses there are non-profits. People want businesses there...but businesses don't move just because they want the tax cut. They come to the area because they want access to the biggest asset in Minneapolis, which is well-educated people. We need to look at businesses more holistically.”

Working as a family law attorney in North Minneapolis also has been an eye-opening experience for Alexander. “I see a lot of people who are very vulnerable. They don't need government to take care of them. They need government to empower them to better themselves. I find, right now, government does a lot to help people in their current situation, but there's more it can do to empower people.”

Alexander hopes to empower the people of his district by being an advocate who is willing to “roll up his sleeves and find solutions.” Alexander knows that “you need to engage people one-on-one and advocate at the same time. Discussing things to death doesn't solve problems. Solving problems requires people to sit down, roll up their sleeves, and find things in common that lead to solutions. You have to look at everything as a possibility to move an agenda forward, not to just discuss the issue more.”

Ian Alexander is endorsed by the International Union of Operating Engineers, North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, and Minneapolis Building and Construction Trade Council. For more information, visit www.voteforian.com



Photo courtesy of Jeff Wilfahrt

JEFF WILFAHRT, DFL CANDIDATE FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISTRICT 57B

When he stood before the state legislature last spring to testify against the marriage amendment, Jeff Wilfahrt knew that the fight for marriage equality was only beginning and that the road to equality would not be easy traveling. But Wilfahrt also knew that he had to wholeheartedly join the fight for equality in order to honor a very special man: his son. Believed to be the first openly gay soldier to die in combat after the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell in 2010, CPL Andrew Wilfahrt served and died in the United States Army, fighting for the rights of all Americans.

Wilfahrt recalls, "As the Minnesota legislature moved on the marriage amendment, I challenged the House and Senate on the basic premise that, if his [Andrew's] taxes were good enough, and his blood was good enough, why weren't his rights good enough?" After receiving state and national recognition due to his testimony, Wilfahrt was asked to run for State Representative for District 57B.

Though equality for all citizens is an extremely large portion of Wilfahrt's platform, he also intends to focus strongly on improving the economy in Minnesota. Wilfahrt states, "We can offer incentives and tax advantages to help business thrive and hire, but we can't rely solely on the private sector. We also need government to invest in rebuilding our infrastructure and creating jobs for and of the future." He suggests that more jobs be created in new energy technology and innovative health care as ways to move the country forward.

Wilfahrt also believes the government must make affordable and accessible higher education a priority. He states, "Our children, our future, are in debt before they can even become employed. We need to find ways that will allow students who want to continue their education after high school to be able to do

so without incurring massive debt." Wilfahrt also believes that schools shouldn't be "forced to borrow money to make up for educational funds the legislature has deferred to balance the budget."

With regard to issues of equality, Wilfahrt recognizes that much relies on the outcome of voting on November 6. He says, "If it passes, little can be done short term. If it fails, and I should win the seat, then I can be expected to support any equality agenda put forth by the majority party...which may be none if the GOP prevails." This fuels his hope to regain a DFL majority in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

If elected, Wilfahrt hopes to support Governor Dayton's initiatives. He says, "It is my belief that Governor Dayton is an earnest man...I do believe he has the larger interest of the larger society in mind with his initiatives. If elected, I intend to vote in support of those initiatives for the benefit of the state."

Jeff Wilfahrt is endorsed by Stonewall DFL, Planned Parenthood, Educator Minnesota, and MPPOA. For more information about Jeff Wilfahrt, visit www.wilfahrt.org.



Photo courtesy of Carla Bates

CARLA BATES SEEKING RE-ELECTION FOR MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOL BOARD

Public schools hold a very important place in Carla Bates's mind and heart—so important that she often says that public schools saved her life. "I grew up as a single child with a single mother, and we were very poor. There was significant instability in our home, and the schools and my teachers provided a steady and encouraging environment for me to grow and, better yet, thrive." The support Bates received from public schools led her to join the Minneapolis School Board in 2008 and to seek re-election this fall.

With three children of their own, Carla and

her partner Susan have experience with the school system firsthand. Carla states that her children "have benefited from and also been hurt by our imperfect system in Minneapolis. There are so many great people in the system, but too often we get tripped up by bureaucratic rules that do not help anyone. I am on the board, and I am dedicated to helping us steer in a better direction."

Bates believes, "The challenge facing public education today is how we ensure that REAL KIDS have REAL OPPORTUNITIES." Real opportunities means that each student will receive the support needed to succeed in school. Bates says, "All families want similar outcomes for their children's education—a solid academic foundation, good interpersonal skills, a commitment to a healthy lifestyle, and engagement in the community." These outcomes help children prepare for college or a career. Bates adds, "Real kids means thinking about each child as a whole person who brings different skills and interests, languages and cultures, resources and family backgrounds to the classroom." Noting that all children don't "bring the same interests or motivations to the classroom," Bates emphasizes that "each child is unique and each child learns in a unique way."

Carla Bates knows her duty and obligation to the Minneapolis Public Schools. "As a school board member, I have a moral and legal commitment to do my best to ensure that each of our 34,000-plus students has a real opportunity to succeed...Since the 2007 adoption of our Strategic Plan, MPS has taken more steps forward than back and I have been proud to be a part of this work."

Bates hopes to continue to strengthen the accountability of the school systems. Bates states, "I strongly support fair and useful evaluations for principals and teachers, as we learn together how best to support all of our students." She also hopes to ensure continued student success by advocating for preK-12 pathways through the Changing Schools Option. She is committed to asking tough questions and providing steady, strong leadership.

School board members don't get noticed as much as other elected officials, and Bates believes that reflects society's current opinion of education. She states, "In a sense, I think we live out the reality of how our society thinks about schools—not often enough nor with enough depth." But Bates urges people to take the work of the school board seriously: "Essentially, we are our society's true investment in the future—our schools are about the future, and every school board member has a responsibility to remind everyone that so go our public schools, so goes our collective future."

Carla Bates is endorsed by DFL, Stonewall DFL, Women Winning, Mayor R.T. Rybak, Senator Scott Dibble, and more. For more information, visit www.carlabates.org.



Photo courtesy of Nathan Johnson

NATHAN JOHNSON, DFL CANDIDATE FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISTRICT 11B

As a lifelong resident of Pine City, Nathan Johnson believes he can best represent the people of District 11B. Johnson, an openly gay candidate for State Representative, has the support of many Pine City residents who view him as a natural leader with a successful track record that ensures his success as a politician. But his concern for the citizens of District 11B is what motivates his campaign. Johnson says, "I've gotten to know many people, and certainly I care about these people. I want to see them live their hopes and dreams here, have opportunities here, and not have to relocate just because it may seem like there are more opportunities in the Twin Cities."

With a background in city planning, Johnson's campaign focuses on economic development and job growth in areas of Minnesota like Pine City. He wants to make sure Governor Dayton "is well aware that this area of Minnesota is a good place to work and live in." Johnson plans to create a supplement to the JOBZ (Job Opportunity Building Zones) plan when it ends in 2015 and also hopes to create an enterprise zone in Western Minnesota in order to ensure competition with border states.

In order to prepare for economic sustainability, Johnson believes that the government should invest more time and money into connecting East Central Minnesota to the Twin Cities with light rail options and other transit options. "We need to be tied to the economic hub of Minnesota which is the Twin Cities, and that's our future. If we sever those ties, and we don't champion building the infrastructure to tie us into that, we really aren't setting up our future."

Johnson also hopes to make improvements in Minnesota's education system. He states, "The big borrow-and-steal budget plan isn't

one that I endorse. So I feel strongly that we need to have education be a top priority and make sure that they have the resources to bring about the top-notch education that Minnesotans have long had and deserve in the future."

Also, Johnson is very environmentally conscious, noting that Pine City has instituted one of the largest rainwater garden projects in the state. "We want to protect our lakes and rivers that are our unique assets that others around the state and elsewhere enjoy and want to continue to enjoy for years to come. We need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to be good stewards of natural resources."

As an openly gay candidate, Johnson also believes that "all Minnesotans should have the freedom and the power to make their own choices for their own lives. I'll stand up on the side of equality and freedom and the things that my grandpa and my dad served in the military for."

Winning back a DFL majority, Johnson believes, will ensure that the priorities of the House will be "more in line with the people of our district and the people of our state." If he were to be elected, Johnson would try to continue to "move the progressive ball forward" and not be a lame-duck legislator. His deep connection to East Central Minnesota provides him with a unique perspective of the area. "I'm not coming here with outside ideas or anything like that. This is where I want to make my life."

Nathan Johnson is currently endorsed by Outfront MN, Stonewall DFL, Carlton County Central Labor Body, and Minnesota AFL-CIO. For more information about Nathan Johnson, visit www.nathanjohnsonforhouse.com.



Photo courtesy of Tom DeGree

TOM DEGREE, DFL CANDIDATE FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISTRICT 39B

A self-described "community builder," Tom DeGree realized that he could make a large

impact by diving into politics. Believing that he can make a difference in his district, especially in education, the businessman and educator hopes to bring some "sanity" back to the House by minimizing the sometimes hostile divide between political parties. DeGree wants to "change Minnesota to be a state where people work together again. It has become so partisan, which is what has happened nationally. There are some things that I can see both ways, and I'm trying to bring that back to help people."

DeGree believes his small business experience owning the Wilde Roast Café with his partner has prepared him to make significant improvements in the economical situation of Minnesota. "As of this pay period, we have 80 employees, proving that there can be growth during an economic recession," DeGree states.

DeGree's experience as an educator strongly influences his political campaign, which focuses heavily on improving the quality of education. He notes that the current legislation is short-changing the schools in order to cover up current debt. DeGree says, "We know that last year, Minnesota borrowed \$2.4 billion from the public schools, and the current legislation is claiming that they have a surplus of \$1.2 billion, but if you count the money they owe the schools, they actually have a deficit of \$1.2 billion. They're manipulating the numbers and not showing the true numbers."

He also hopes to preserve Minnesota's precious environment. While running an environmental in his area, DeGree learned that "a lot of people appreciate open spaces. It's important that we enjoy the outdoor spaces and enjoy being here in Minnesota."

DeGree hopes to encourage better communication and problem-solving between Democrats and Republicans in office. "I hate having people so divided. I live in an area that's 50/50. I grew up in this area. It's always been 50/50, but it hasn't been as 'partisan.' At the door, when I'm talking to people, it isn't like that. When you read the news or see television, you would think that people hate each other and are against each other. But when we're knocking at the doors, everybody wants people that work together to solve problems. We can get back to the sanity of working together—how Minnesota was created and why we're a leader in many areas. My goal is not to be a life-long politician, I never thought of doing this. I simply see myself as a person that can help us."

Tom DeGree is endorsed by Outfront MN, Stonewall DFL, MAPE, AFSCME, Clean Water Action and the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association. For more information, visit www.tomdegree.com.



Photo courtesy of Jeff Anderson

JEFF ANDERSON, DFL CANDIDATE FOR UNITED STATES CONGRESS FOR MINNESOTA'S 8TH DISTRICT

Growing up in Minnesota's Iron Range prepared Jeff Anderson to be a strong candidate for United States Congress, and he hopes to bring the needs of Minnesota's 8th District to Washington. Anderson believes that, "as a product of this district, as a fourth-generation Iron Ranger, as a businessman, as a veteran, and as President of the City Council," he is able to represent Northern Minnesota. He states, "We need a representative in Congress who understands the history of this district, who has seen the ups and downs, who knows the challenges and opportunities that face us and can take that to Washington, D.C. to work on behalf of the people here to create those

jobs, to be a partner, and to support our natural resource-based economy, which is timber, tourism, mining. Those are important things here in Minnesota."

Anderson's main focus is to create jobs in Northern Minnesota, allowing individuals to support their families and their livelihoods. "This race to me is all about jobs, jobs, jobs." As a child, his father was laid off from a local mine, and Anderson's family had to rely on food stamps and fuel assistance. Though many families left the area during the economic downturn, the Anderson family stayed and worked hard to improve their lives. Anderson put himself through college by joining the Minnesota Army National Guard, and he returned to the area after he was honorably discharged to work as a businessman and eventually become involved in local politics.

Anderson believes, "Our greatest export in Northern Minnesota is our young people." Realizing that many young people were moving away from the area, and recognizing a negative tone in the local government, Anderson became a member of the City Council in 2007. Anderson and his fellow elected officials "have worked very hard to change that tone and create economic opportunities for people. It's that type of energy, it's that type of attitude, it's that type of model that I'd like to use in Washington to benefit the rest of this district. I see the next generation of Northern Minnesota prosperity on the horizon. It's just having the right leaders in place to get there."

As one of the first openly gay elected officials in Northern Minnesota, Anderson has already proven himself as a champion for equality and plans to continue to do so if elected. Not only was Duluth the first city to officially join the "Vote No" campaign, but Duluth also

became the second city in Minnesota to pass a domestic partnership registry program in 2009, with much help from Anderson who introduced and worked to pass the bill. "We did that here in Duluth because the City Council and the Mayor recognize that all people should be treated equally. In Duluth, we want our city to be welcoming and to recognize that there are all sorts of different relationships. We want people who live and work here (and people who might consider moving here) to know that we are that community." On a national level, Anderson believes that, "when it comes to the government of the United States, we need to treat everyone the same and make sure everyone has the same recognition of their relationship in a legal status."

Anderson encourages residents to get out and vote this year. He believes that "We can make history in Minnesota this year. We can defeat the marriage amendment, and in a rural district of Minnesota we can elect the first LGBT candidate for Congress from the state of Minnesota. We are able to show that we are a progressive, forward-thinking state."

Jeff Anderson is endorsed by The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), Stonewall DFL, United Transportation Union Alumni, and eQuality Giving.org. For more information, please visit www.jeffanderson.org.

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House Representative Paul Thissen, Minnesota District 63A
House Representative Linda Slocum, Minnesota District 63B
State Senator John Marty, Minnesota District 54
State Senator Scott Dibble, Minnesota District 60
State Senator Patricia Torres Ray, Minnesota District 62
Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin, Wisconsin District 2

NOTABLE CANDIDATES:

Brian Barnes, Congress, 3rd Congressional District
Jim Graves, Congress, 6th Congressional District
Jim Carlson, State Senate, Minnesota District 51
Greg Clausen, State Senate, Minnesota District 57
Lorrie Janatopoulos, Minnesota House, District 6B
Denise Bader, Minnesota House, District 33B
David Joseph DeGrio, Minneapolis School Board



Photo courtesy of Scott Endres

Mini Garden Getaways at our Fingertips

LEAVE IT TO the dog days of summer to take its toll on gardeners and non-gardeners alike. For the gardener, our seasonal plantings have matured, and we might be at a crossroads of what to do next. With the summer heat, we might be in need of new ideas. Worse yet, some of you may have given up on a few tough spots or thrown in the towel, ready for another season and a fresh start. A simple cure for these gardening conundrums might just be a little garden tour getaway to refuel a gardener's creative energy level.

There are so many fabulous public gardens throughout the world worthy of the airfare, but too often we forget the treasures that are close at hand right here in the Twin Cities area. Fortunately for us, these close-at-hand gardens are full of great ideas whenever we need them. Here are a few of my favorites that make great mini getaways this or any time of the year.

One gem right in our backyard is the Lake Harriet Rose Garden and Peace Garden. The Peace Garden boasts unusual conifer and perennial plantings in a surreal natural setting, while the Rose Garden across the street is a more formal affair with clean lines, ornate fountains, and almost always a photographer or two trying to capture the beauty of this jewel of the Minneapolis Park System within their lens.

Not far away, right off Minnehaha Parkway near the Minnehaha Falls you will find Longfellow Gardens, another garden maintained by the Minneapolis Park Board. The gardens are planted above the hustle and bustle of Hiawatha Avenue and are made up mostly of perfectly designed annual beds with a speckling of perennials here and there. I love to visit Longfellow Gardens for a quick garden pick-me-up as it is pint sized, very accessible, and nearby other beautiful destinations like the Minnehaha Falls, and the scenic Minnehaha Parkway and River Road. The gardens are well designed, showcasing

new, unusual, and workhorse plants, great color combinations, and there are always butterflies galore.

On the other side of the river, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory in Saint Paul's Como Park offers a great refuge on rainy days under the historic glass of this Victorian era conservatory and über state-of-the-art modern annex full of educational demonstrations. Unusual tropical plant collections are not to be missed, but my favorites here are the conservatory's Bonsai Collection and the nearby Ordway Memorial Japanese Garden (the Japanese garden is currently closed for renovation, but will re-open in 2013 better than ever).

For a short drive out of town, venture out to Noerenberg Memorial Gardens on the North shore of Lake Minnetonka. This hidden treasure is meticulously nurtured by the Three Rivers Park District with funds set aside by the Noerenberg family who donated the site for public enjoyment in 1972. The gardens are very well designed with a sophisticated mix of herbaceous annuals, perennials, hardy grasses, and woody trees and shrubs. I have always been impressed by the utter beauty of this out-of-the-mainstream garden, but I think the gardens are at their very best in late summer and into fall.

Last, but never least, is the vast acreage of the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen. Countless demonstration gardens, plant collections, and events offer something for everyone. Don't plan on seeing everything in one visit, as that might prove impossible. Rather, like most of these great public gardens, come back again and again to truly appreciate the magic, beauty and inspiration each season offers. □

Scott Endres is co-owner of Tangletown Gardens and Tangletown's Wise Acre Eatery on 54th and Nicollet in South Minneapolis.

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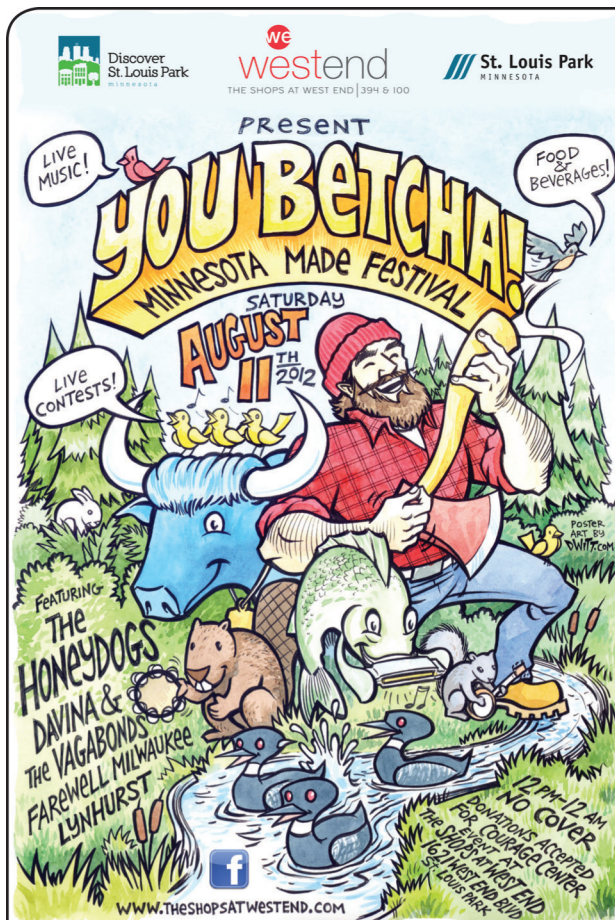


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2012 Mercedes-Benz E350 4MATIC sedan. Photos by Randy Stern

MERCEDES-BENZ E-CLASS

WHEN THE TERM "luxury car" is said, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Let's get this out of the way—your answer is correct. It is because we often throw a lot of brands into the luxury mix. When it is time to sort them all out, only a few nameplates stand above the rest. Each have their individual interpretation of what luxury is all about. Of course, they are all correct.

If there was some form of agreement on one brand that represents the essence of today's luxury car, Mercedes-Benz is the correct answer to that question.

Why consider Mercedes-Benz above everyone else? Consistency. Everything Mercedes-Benz does for their products and their customers, especially in the USA, is to the highest level possible. This is the perception of the three-pointed star ever since it began to eclipse Cadillac and Lincoln on this soil back in the 1970s.

Today's Mercedes-Benz shares a lot of the same tenets that propelled them to luxury car leadership a few decades ago. Sedans wear a modern interpretation of the radiator

grille that is one of the trademarks for the brand. Sportier models have grilles that harken back to the great Gullwing SLs of the 1950s. Tail lamp clusters, interior designs and materials, side details, and engine bay configurations may have evolved over time, but they always point to a heritage that has only been imitated by others looking for the same aura and pedigree as the original.

The one thing that has not changed is the core of the Mercedes-Benz lineup.

It is a vast lineup to begin with—15 different models on sale in the USA. In the middle is the essence of the brand. Not the flagship S-Class with every model averaging six-figures on the sticker. Not the best-selling C-Class, trying hard to eat into the BMW 3-Series's dominance in the market. If you walk into a Mercedes-Benz showroom today, you are also welcomed with a wide range of coupes, convertibles, roadsters, SUVs, crossovers, wagons, four-door coupes, and so forth.

However, the core model of the lineup has always been a target for the competition.

Every luxury brand is mandated to build a mid-sized sedan that can seat 4-5, employ about 300HP on tap, offer an all-wheel drive system, a powerful V8, an alternative fuel/propulsion option and a high-performance variant—along with other body styles to keep the consumer confused.

Ask any luxury car owner to point out the best of the best, and you would have quite an argument. In every argument, however, one car gets mention in every one: The E-Class.

Mercedes-Benz's "middle" model has the longest lineage of the entire line. You can trace its origins to after World War II with every sedan that does not have the letter "S" on the trunk. If there was a standard-bearer for the entire line, the E-Class has to be it.

But is it? Is the E-Class still the finest mid-sized luxury sedan in the universe?

In classic Mercedes fashion, the E-Class exudes style and poise. The modern radiator grille and hood ornament make a statement of your arrival—something that still resonates with the E-Class. The rest of the design remained recognizable with plenty

of modern touches. One cannot deny the place the E-Class has when it makes its way through traffic.

A particular term is apt when describing every aspect of the E-Class: "Right-sized." If you look at its proportions and dimensions, the term simply fits. It is not too big or too small. The doors are about the right size. The trunk lid and cargo hold are as well. No wonder why it attracts the buyers of the BMW 5-Series, Audi A6, Lexus GS, Infiniti M, Acura TL, Jaguar XF, and, soon, the Cadillac CTS.

The inside feels "right-sized." Four normal-sized adults would enjoy the space inside—a fifth person in the middle of the rear seat may be a push. This particular tester, the E350 4MATIC, came with an active multi-contour driver's seat that had plenty of lumbar adjustments and other bells and whistles. It took a while to get comfortable after making several adjustments, including lumbar supports for the middle and lower back. Otherwise, they were big enough to accommodate most drivers. The tester was upholstered with the brand's famous MB-Tex vinyl that almost felt like real leather.

The instrumentation arrangement and center stack were quite intriguing. The center dial has a TFT screen in the middle with various readouts ranging from radio frequency to trip information. The five-dial arrangement was elegant and simple to read, including a sizeable traditional-looking clock. Using the controls was relatively easy, save for the cruise control stalk, located above the turn signal in the E-Class. There were times when I reached for the cruise stalk instead of the turn signal.

Another complaint was the position of the steering wheel. In most vehicles, you would expect the steering wheel to be dead center to your torso. The E-Class wheel was a tad off-center to the right. Not exactly confidence-building, even for the enthusiast.

There was one control that saved the day for the E-Class: The COMAND system. Using the COMAND knob for the navigation and audio systems was intuitive and simple. Once you understand what the knob does in which mode—whether it is for navigation or audio selection—the knob comes in quite handy at the precise moment. Sound came from an optional harman/kardon 14-speaker system, which included Sirius satellite and HD radio. It makes a beautiful noise throughout the cabin. The screen for the AM/FM radio reminded me of an old console receiver from the 1930s—a classy touch that elevates the E-Class from the days when all you could get was a Becker Mexico radio in a Mercedes-Benz.

The E350 4MATIC tester also came with a petroleum-fed 302-horsepower 3.5litre V6 with direction injection. In the E-Class, the V6 simply felt perfect. It reacted accordingly to propel this 3,900-pound luxury sedan anywhere you pointed it. This is also due to having 273 lb-ft of torque at hand.

A 7-speed automatic transmission and Mercedes-Benz's 4MATIC all-wheel drive system are mated to create a fantastic drive-line. The right column-mounted shifter stalk was straightforward and easy to use. For individual gear selection, you have paddles on the back of the steering wheel. Mercedes claims that the E-Class will get 30MPG on the highway, with a 20MPG rating for the city.

On the road, the E-Class was poised and ready. Curves were flattened out with almost no roll at all. The ride was balanced with some road imperfection feedback. Turning the wheel was amazing as the speed sensitivity allowed for tight and accurate turns to be executed just right. The brakes felt sharp and direct to the touch.

The basic driving dynamics seemed fine, but what if you wanted to get more response? There is a button on the console to push that

switched from "E" (Economy) mode to "S" (Sport) mode. That changed the way the E-Class drove. In "S" mode, the engine opened up more, transmission shifts were crisper, steering response much sharper, and the suspension tightened to even out the curves and firmed up the ride without jarring your spine.

There is a catch to that button. You always have to switch it to "S" after you start the car. Most vehicles with such a button operate that way, which is quite annoying. I would prefer to drive an E-Class in "S" all the time.

This E350 4MATIC tester came in well equipped at \$60,480, including a panoramic sunroof and a Sport package. Realistically, this is exactly where you will see a bulk of the luxury mid-sized six-cylinder sedans price-wise. The price you pay for the badge may end up being a relative bargain, based on the value you get from the product. In that case, you simply cannot go wrong with the E-Class.

Or, can you? The competition is good, but choosing one in this class at this price point requires thinking about your place in the universe. Does it fit you, your needs, wants, and desires? Does it fit your lifestyle, position, employment, and community involvement? What about your pursuits, hobbies, and recreational activities?

Lastly, how does a Mercedes-Benz E-Class fit into all of the above?

Aside from being a very good car, the E-Class is truly an investment in your life. No one buys a Mercedes-Benz without some form of justification. However, if you can truly justify buying one with the iconic three-pointed star, the E-Class is your best choice.

After all, your answer is still correct. ◻

Randy Stern is an automotive writer from Robbinsdale, Minnesota. He can be followed at Victory & Reseda – <http://www.randystern.net>.



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OUR VOICES



SKIRTING THE ISSUES | Ellen Krug

Plan E

THERE'S AN IMPORTANT new survey to determine how transpeople interact with the Minnesota courts.

But—big surprise—first a story.

A half dozen years ago, before I ever got the guts to transition from boy to girl, a fifty-something named Julie walked into my Cedar Rapids law office.

Julie was a true pioneer—the first transgender to transition at her employer, a large manufacturer where she worked as an electrical engineer. She had done almost everything that any male-to-female could hope for—name change, the bathroom issue at work, surgery. She even preserved her marriage to a very understanding woman.

What brought Julie to my office was, on paper, a piece of cake. She wanted to change the gender marker on her Iowa driver's license from "M" to "F." Iowa law made that fairly easy for people who had Iowa birth certificates.

Julie's problem? She was born in Wyoming.

I thought I'd take a shortcut. I filed a motion with the Court requesting that it issue a one line statement acknowledging that Julie had undergone sexual reassignment surgery and now was truly "female." I figured the DMV wouldn't ignore a judge's pronouncement about Julie's new gender.

A couple days later, I received the Court's answer: "*Motion denied.*"

I thought, *What the hell?*

After all, no one actually opposed my motion. The DMV couldn't have cared less; all they wanted was a court order.

I went to Plan B. I called the judge who had denied my motion. I asked if I could meet with him in person. He refused. I then asked if he'd at least hear me out on the telephone. Reluctantly, he agreed.

"Your Honor," I said. "There's no dispute that my client's a woman now. She simply wants her driver's license to reflect current reality. With all due respect, why is this an issue?"

He hesitated. I couldn't understand why.

Finally, the judge barked, "I'm not going to sign the order. I won't stick my neck out."

Stick your neck out?

Then I remembered. Another Iowa judge—this one in Sioux City—was the subject of a recall petition because he had granted two lesbians a divorce. The judge had made an honest mistake—the divorcing couple had ambiguous first names, which made

it appear they were of opposite genders. It didn't matter that the judge only dealt with paperwork and never even eyed the parties to know they were lesbian.

In the end, the Sioux City judge barely kept his job.

I fell back to Plan C. I found an attorney in Wyoming to open a court case to ask that Julie's Wyoming birth certificate be modified. The attorney assured me he was up to the task.

When the day for the hearing in Cheyenne arrived, the attorney suddenly backed out. "I can't risk what this could to my reputation," he confessed.

"*Coward*," I said to myself.

On to Plan D. I located a brave woman attorney who volunteered at the ACLU. "I'll do it," she proclaimed.

Eight months and nearly \$5000 after Julie first walked into my office, she had a court order attesting to her true gender. A day later, the Iowa DMV gave her a new driver's license, this one with "F" for a gender marker.

The take-away here is that fear, bigotry, and ignorance in the court system—by lawyers, judges, and even clerks and bailiffs—can be devastating for transpeople trying to make their way to completeness. Yes, the court system can be unfair to anyone—whether straight or the other alphabet letters, L, G, and B. However, transpeople are the only group who have to lay out their innermost secrets—"I was born one gender, now I'm really the other"—in order to get something easy like a driver's license change.

The starting point is to understand exactly what problems exist for transpeople. To do this, OutFront Minnesota and Call for Justice, LLC, have created an on-line questionnaire which asks transpeople about their interaction with the Minnesota civil and criminal court systems.

The survey can be found at www.outfront.org/library/legal/trans.

If you're transgender and have interacted with the Minnesota court system, this is your chance to be heard. Take the survey. You can even volunteer for a focus group.

The study is part of yet another plan—Plan E.

"E" for *Equality*. □

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DATELAND | Jennifer Parelo

A First... and Last... Date

THE NAME OF this column is Date-land, and it was originally designed to talk about my dating life. But that was two long-term relationships ago. Apparently, once you enter a “committed” relationship, you are no longer allowed to date. Even if you use the really good excuse that you need material for your dating column.

My long-term relationships kind of....errr....overlapped, so I didn’t get a chance to sneak a few dates in-between. That might explain why this column has not focused on dating in recent years, but rather on the tiny thrills that momentarily interrupt middle-age malaise, like my inability to find baby lima beans at supermarkets.

Well, good news! The streak is broken. Last weekend, I went on a date. My girlfriend organized the date, which may explain why it went so horribly wrong. I need to reveal a cold, hard, fact about long-term relationships: after a few years, you run out of things to talk about. I knew my relationship was getting musty when my girlfriend and I spent a solid half-hour discussing the many charms of Morning Star faux meat products. “We need to get some fresh blood into this relationship,” I said, following the stunningly dull Morningstar conversation. My girlfriend perked up. She’s much more sexually adventurous than I, and she immediately began fantasizing about luring some sad character into a threesome. I disabused her of this notion with a disgusted sigh that signaled I knew exactly where her filthy mind had wandered. I think consenting adults should do whatever the hell they want to do with each other, but threesomes, foursomes, or whatever-somes are not for me. I’m incredibly self-absorbed and have enough trouble focusing on one person, let alone several. And what do you do with these strangers when you’re done with sexy time? How do you get them out of the house? Do you have to feed these people breakfast?

So, I explained to my girlfriend that we

needed to meet new friends. We have been isolated since the local lesbian community banished us on charges that our adulterous affair had displeased God, or caused a plague of frogs and locusts, or created some other Old Testament-type catastrophe. We were cast out into the wilderness. I mean this literally. We live in a remote cabin in the woods.

Thus, it’s been just the two of us—and our Morningstar meatless products—against the world! It was both devastating and thrilling to be the focus of so much bad energy. But the local lesbian cabal has long since moved on to new dramas, and now we both long for the exciting days of being pariahs. At least it gave us something interesting to chat about.

My girlfriend is a can-do gal. Give her an assignment and she gets it done pronto. So, it didn’t surprise me that on the day that I announced we needed to make some friends, she dragged a lesbian couple home to me.

They had accidentally driven up our driveway, which looks like a road, but actually dead-ends at our house. Just as they realized their mistake, my girlfriend furiously waved them up to the house.

They looked as stunned and panicked as baby bunnies that had been dragged into the house by a hungry cat. They stood in the middle of my living-room, mouths agape and wild-eyed, looking for the nearest exit.

“They’re up from the city and were looking for a place to stay for the night,” my girlfriend explained. “So I invited them to stay with us.”

“Well, this will certainly give us something to talk about for years to come,” I said.

(Stay tuned for our next episode, when we learn what a stupid idea it is to invite two complete strangers to spend a week-end with you.) ■

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Dear Ms. Behavior:

I am a gay man and am in a 12-step program because of all the terrible things that my family and society did to me. Recently I was in the local Post Office, speaking with my sponsor. I had an urgent problem that I was explaining in great detail. I felt sure that she was about to give me the most important advice of my life when something very disturbing happened. Suddenly my sponsor's girlfriend walked into the Post Office and it was as if me and my problems just didn't matter anymore. It was a frenzy of curves, hair, and lips run amok right there in the lobby! Then my sponsor left without even saying goodbye or divulging the golden key to my eternal happiness.

While I can appreciate that my sponsor's girlfriend is a major babe and I love a good saliva-fest as much as anyone, I feel miffed. Was that good gay-sponsor etiquette, Ms. Behavior? I feel abandoned. Is the lesson that my sponsor's girlfriend is the most beautiful and important person in the world? What about my eternal happiness? Am I too needy? Please help me with this pressing crisis!

By the way, are you in a 12-step program, and if so, will you be my sponsor?

—CONFUSED, BUT STILL SOBER

Dear Confused but still Sober:

Your mother once made you feel that you were the center of the universe, which was good at a certain point in your development. The problem is that she forgot to inform you that your infantile magnificence ends when you are no longer in diapers. Now you're miffed that your sponsor's girlfriend's radiance has eclipsed your own, or at least that the girlfriend's pheromonal secretions (or diapers) are more alluring than yours. Your sponsor's girlfriend may not be the most beautiful and important person in the world, but she is to your sponsor, which is healthy. This is a good relationship model from which you might learn.

Your own eternal happiness must come from within. If you cannot find another way to cultivate it, Ms. Behavior will be forced to suggest that you spend more time in front of the mirror, naked, confronting your issues with your own inner and outer beauty. And yes, perhaps you are too needy.

If Ms. Behavior were in a 12-step program, the tradition of anonymity would prevent her from disclosing this fact. But in her role as advisor and dispenser of good will, she is sponsor to both everyone and no one.

Dear Ms. Behavior,

We are two gay men who host a weekly Scrabble group at our house. Our problem is with a lesbian couple who attend. We'll

call them 'Carol and Mary Jane'. Carol and Mary Jane are both writers and use a lot of big words. This intimidates us as we're sissies by nature, and often this causes us to lose points. What should we do?

—TED AND BEN

Dear Ted and Ben:

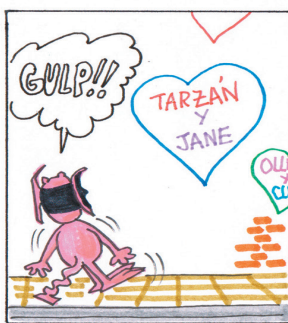
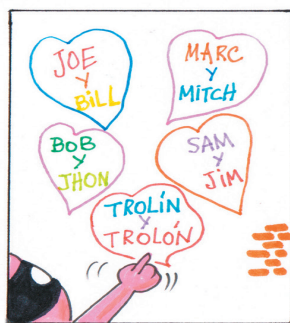
Ms. Behavior loves competitive sissies! Perhaps she can help you even the score with your lesbian foes. First, you need to be released from your sensation of intimidation. Like many gay men victimized by our culture, you two are misdirected and stuck in "Bigger is Better" mode. While this principle generally holds true with penises and certain cuts of red meat, it's not necessarily true of other things, like shoes, dogs, or words.

If you want to beat the lesbians at Scrabble, you'll need to practice methods that will catch them off guard. For example, use small but effective words that will make their skin crawl, like "gism", "felching", and "smegma." Don't let them sit next to each other and hold hands, as separation will foster their discomfort. Serve only snacks that lesbians won't eat: beef jerky, pigs in blankets, non-organic chicken wings. They will be weakened by hunger. (Most lesbians are hypoglycemic and need feedings every 25-35 minutes.) The weaker they get, the more likely you are to win! □

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I'm on the "Wall of Love".
Je figure sur le "mur de l'amour".



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That Awkward Moment When...

HE THROWS ME to the bed, hops on top of me, and kisses me. He pulls away to tell me I'm beautiful and tickles my neck with his scruff. I play innocent; he plays captor. He holds me down and nibbles my ear. My body flushes with adrenaline.

We're home after dinner (and a couple glasses of wine). The scent is deliciously Parisian: we've come from a French restaurant, and I smell now the alcohol on our breath, the food on our clothes, and our cologne mixing. A fragrant romance. Yes, I am cliché.

We roll around on my bed, somewhere between tickle-fighting and full-blown sex, but before the passion crests, we pause to freshen ourselves. As romantic as are the scents we collected tonight, they don't taste so good. OK, maybe the wine does. But a tooth-brushing at the very least is necessary.

We stop our post-dinner intensity to brush our teeth, wash our faces, and joke with one another as we do so. He pinches my butt through my underwear. We make silly faces in the mirror. The break, however brief, tempers our lust. Afterward, we lay down in bed, reading our books and playing on our computers for a while. We kiss occasionally, but nothing like it was when we burst into my room after dinner.

After some time, he shuts his computer off and kisses my neck. He's ready for bed, but

I postpone for a few minutes: "Just few more pages," I say to finish reading the chapter I'm in. I kiss his forehead, and he's asleep long before I finish. Ten minutes later, I shut off my bedside lamp and slip down beside him.

And here I lay. Look at us, I think, now snuggled next to him in the dark. We've been dating only a couple months and it feels like we've been together forever. We read in bed after romantic dinners and snuggle instead of... well, instead of doing what you would otherwise think a newly minted, honeymoon-soaked couple would do in the infancy of a romance.

I turn to my side and find his arm to wrap it around me. He squeezes me, and we drift to sleep.

Make no mistake: Lust makes her appearance, but not like before—not like with past bedfellows, where the sex is both the goal and a triviality. "Dalliance" here is nowhere implied. Sex with him is different. It's more about restraint, temptation, and sensuality. To put it plainly, it's a ton of foreplay, which is often just as pleasing, for a more explosive, satisfying finale.

Morning comes and we cuddle in silence. We rub the sleep out of our eyes. I complain about work. And then we get silly. He tickles me to wake me up. I try to avoid his kisses—I don't want him tasting or smelling my morning breath—and we roll around in bed until

we're wide awake, and out of breath.

I'm on my back, panting from our play, and he's on top of me, looking at me, brushing my hair back. He isn't looking at my eyes. He's... studying me. It makes me feel uncomfortable, awkward. No matter how often he does this, I think the same: he's looking for a new wrinkle, another blemish, a reason, some kind of detail, to find to stop liking me.

"Why do you look at me all over like that?" I ask.

"Because I like looking at you," he responds.

"It makes me feel insecure," I say, and I recall how I cower from my own face when it's magnified in one of those obnoxious magnification mirrors. In the morning light, particularly, I must look terrible.

"It shouldn't," he says. "I think you're beautiful."

And so there "it" is: It's that awkward moment when he's looking at you and you're insecure. It's that awkward moment when you find yourself falling asleep without **NEEDING** sex. It's that awkward moment when you stop to catch your breath, when you stop thinking... and start being. ■

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